



**JUNE 1998**

# **interZone**

**£3.00**

**132**



## **'Emergency Exit'**

**Colin Greenland**

plus stories by

**Dominic Green**

**Tanith Lee**

**Alexander Glass**

**Keith Brooke**

**Ian Watson**



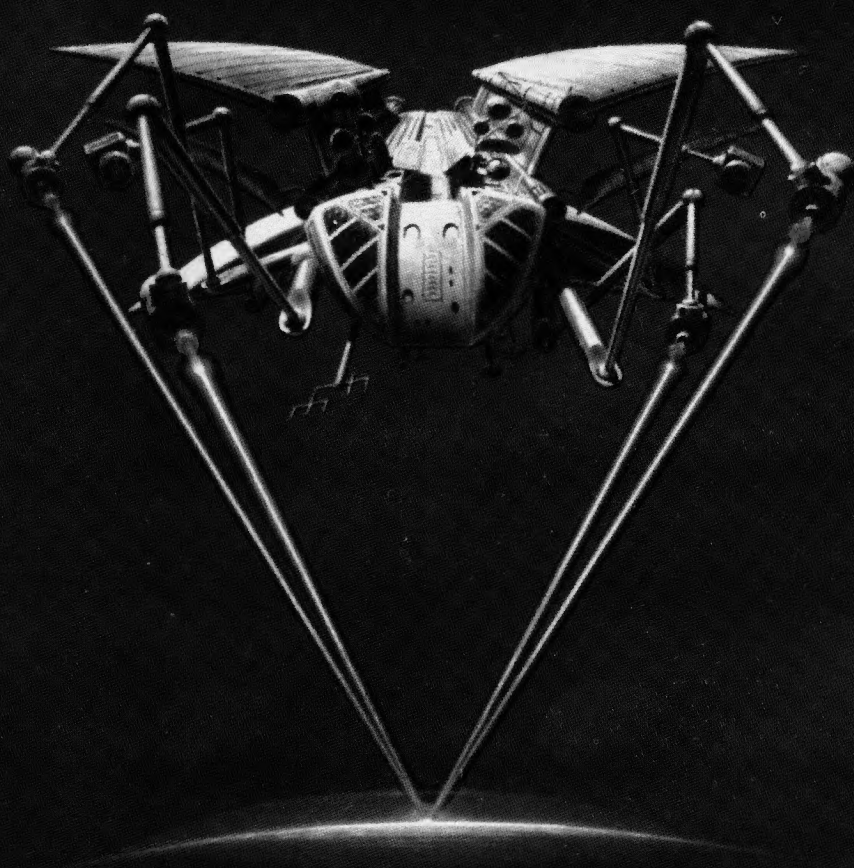
K E N  
M A C L E O D

'This man's going to be a major writer'

*IAIN BANKS*

'Prose sleek and fast as the technology it describes...  
watch this man go global'

*PETER F. HAMILTON*

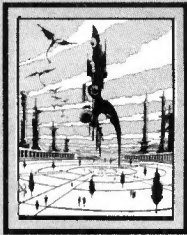


T H E C A S S I N I  
D I V I S I O N

A V A I L A B L E N O W



<http://www.orbitbooks.co.uk>



Vignettes by SMS

**Editor & Publisher**  
David Pringle  
**Deputy Editor**  
Lee Montgomerie  
**Assistant Editors**  
Paul Annis,  
Andy Robertson,  
Andrew Tidmarsh

**Consultant Editor**  
Simon Ounsley

**Advisory Editors**  
John Clute,  
Malcolm Edwards,  
Judith Hanna

**Graphic Design and Typesetting**  
Paul Brazier

**Subscriptions Secretary**  
Ann Pringle

**Interzone**  
217 Preston Drive, Brighton BN1 6FL,  
United Kingdom.

All subscriptions, back-issue orders,  
general correspondence, books for  
review, and enquiries about advertising  
should be sent to this address.

**Subscriptions:**  
£32 for one year (12 issues) in the UK.

Cheques or postal orders should be  
crossed and made payable to *Interzone*.

Overseas subscriptions are £38,  
payable by International Money Order.

Payments may also be made by  
MasterCard, Visa or Eurocard: please  
send your cardholder's name, initials  
and address written in block letters,  
with card number, card expiry date and  
signature. (Note: overseas payments will  
be charged at the £ sterling rate.)

Alternatively, American subscribers  
may pay by dollar check, drawn on a  
U.S. bank, at \$60. (All copies to other  
continents are sent by Air Saver, i.e.  
accelerated surface mail.).

**Lifetime subscriptions:**  
Lifetime subscriptions: £320 (UK);  
£380 (overseas); \$600 (USA).

**Back-issues**  
of *Interzone* are available at £3 each in  
the UK  
(£3.50 each overseas), postage included.  
(US dollar price: \$6 Air Saver.)

All issues are in print except numbers  
1-2, 4-13, 15-24, 31, 33, 37, 51 & 60.  
Order them from the address above.

**Submissions:**  
stories, in the 2,000-6,000 word range,  
should be sent singly and each one  
must be accompanied by a stamped  
self-addressed envelope of adequate  
size. Persons overseas please send a  
disposable manuscript (marked as  
such) and two International Reply  
Coupons. We are unable to reply to  
writers who do not send return postage.  
No responsibility can be accepted for  
loss or damage to unsolicited material,  
howsoever caused. Submissions should  
be sent to the Brighton address above.

# interZone

June 1998

132

science fiction & fantasy

## CONTENTS

### Fiction

<b>DOMINIC GREEN</b> <b>That Thing Over There</b> <i>Illustrated by Dominic Harman</i>	6
<b>TANITH LEE</b> <b>Yellow and Red</b>	15
<b>COLIN GREENLAND</b> <b>Emergency Exit</b>	32
<b>ALEXANDER GLASS</b> <b>Storage</b>	35
<b>KEITH BROOKE</b> <b>Segue</b>	43
<b>IAN WATSON</b> <b>What Actually Happened in Docklands</b>	48

### Features

<b>INTERACTION</b> <i>Readers' letters</i>	4
<b>SCARY SPICE IN SPACE?</b> <b>Colin Greenland interviewed by</b> <b>Paul Brazier and David Pringle</b>	27
<b>DAVID LANGFORD</b> <b>Ansible Link</b>	36
<b>MUTANT POPCORN</b> <i>Film reviews Nick Lowe</i>	37
<b>TUBE CORN</b> <i>TV reviews Wendy Bradley</i>	38
<b>MILLENIAL EVE(S)</b> <i>Drama review Roy Gray</i>	44
<b>KEITH BROOKE</b> <b>SF on the Internet</b>	45
<b>PAUL J. MCAULEY, DAVID L. STONE, PETER CROWTHER</b> <b>AND CHRIS GILMORE</b> <i>Book reviews</i>	54

**Cover by Jim Burns** for Colin Greenland's novel *Mother of Plenty*  
(courtesy of Harper Collins)

Published monthly. All material is © *Interzone*, 1998, on behalf of the various contributors

**ISSN 0264-3596**

Printed by KP Litho Ltd, Brighton

**Trade distribution:** Diamond Magazine Distribution Ltd.,  
Unit 7, Rother Ironworks, Fishmarket Road, Rye,  
East Sussex TN31 7LR (tel. 01797 225229).

**Bookshop distribution:** Central Books,  
99 Wallis Rd., London E9 5LN (tel. 0181 986 4854).



Dear Editors:

Re: the review of my novel *Ship of Fools* (IZ 130, page 62). At the risk of being one of those idiots who can't leave well enough alone, and are forever railing at any review that's less than entirely laudatory, I'd like to reassure people that *Ship of Fools* is not actually an incredibly bad murder mystery. It is in fact an incredibly bad cookery book, with recipes and jokes. Just my luck that Paul Brazier left it on the train before he came across either. (That's not an attempt at being arch, incidentally: if Paul had got to where the jokes pay off he might have liked or hated them, but at the very least would have mentioned it – I make no claims for the damn things either way.)

Humour's such a subjective thing, of course. I've just got a review copy of *Ronan's Revenge* by James Bibby, and I'd love to know precisely who on *Interzone* had the sensibilities and critical faculties necessary to call it "a greatly superior item" – if only so I can ask them how I'm spectacularly missing the point. [Er ... the quote was from Chris Gilmore, reviewing the first novel in Bibby's series, Ronan the Barbarian, in IZ 100. What Chris actually wrote was, "If you crease up to the work of Andrew Harman and Phil Janes, this one is for you – indeed, it's a greatly superior item – but include me out" – Editor.]

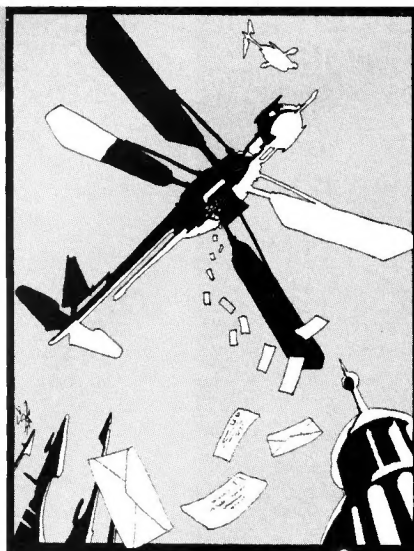
On an only vaguely related note: someone told me the other day that the reviewers in a certain "spinoffery"-based magazine judge *Doctor Who* books to a consistently higher standard than *Trek*... with the result that they score consistently lower on the resulting ten-point scale. I'm glad that, to the best of my recollection, IZ has never descended to something so asinine as giving stuff marks out of ten. [Hmm... our 1997 anthology, *The Best of Interzone* (Voyager, £5.99 – still on sale), scored ten out of ten in one of the scales you're criticizing; so we're not complaining – Editor.] As it stands, your format for reviews leaves room for personal insight and response – and strikes me as a remarkably even-handed arrangement whether the end result is in the positive or negative.

Mind you, "Left it on the train; couldn't be bothered to get another copy before reviewing it – *Interzone*," is going to look really nice on my CV web-page under *Ship of Fools*. (Insert smiley symbol.)

**Dave Stone**

<http://www.sgloomi.demon.co.uk>

**Paul Brazier writes:** The book wasn't published yet, so I couldn't buy another copy; and I did ask, but Virgin didn't send another copy. I don't like murder mysteries, but I



tried to be fair based on what I had read. For more train adventures, see my review in the next *Interzone*.

Dear Editors:

I would largely concur with your observation (made in IZ 129's editorial) that *Interzone* is the last fiction-based monthly. However, in response to your call for additional information (beneath the same editorial), I would add to your brief list of long-running fiction publications. *Xenos* (small-format, bimonthly) has published 47 issues since 1990, making it (although more of a digest) your oldest actual rival in the field of speculative fiction. Also *Peeping Tom*, the small-press horror magazine, has been around for quite a while (having recently published its 30th quarterly issue). *Tom* also publishes many of the same writers as *Interzone* and, like *IZ*, has had a story reprinted in Stephen Jones's *Best New Horror*.

I would also take this opportunity to mention the very impressive content of IZ 130, which arrived this morning. Eight fiction contributions? Unless I am mistaken, this is a record. As soon as I've polished off Agatha Christie's *After the Funeral*, I'll get down to reading it...

**David L. Stone**

Ramsgate, Kent

**Editor:** Agatha Christie? How quaint. Actually, she's the world's all-time best-selling author of fiction, according to The Guinness Book of Records, and I realized somewhat to my shame recently that I don't have a single one of her books in my house (despite having many dozens of other old crime-fiction paperbacks from over the years, partly a legacy of my days as editor-publisher of *Million: The Magazine About Popular Fiction* [1990-1993] – obviously having no knowledge of Christie was a major disqualification for that job.) We should point out, for the benefit of any confused readers, that the David L. Stone who wrote the above letter is not the same person as the novelist Dave

Stone who wrote the letter preceding. Both are *Interzone* subscribers, and assiduous writers, and perhaps you'll be seeing some of their fiction here one day. If so, maybe David L., who we believe is the younger, should consider changing his byline so as not to be mistaken for the great Dave Stone Senior... If his middle name is boringly ordinary, he could make up a more memorable one – something like "D. Larrikin Stone"? (Shades of Frank Belknap Long, or Philip José Farmer – who apparently was middle-named "Jose" after his mother, and later added the acute accent for effect.) Names do matter for writers.

Dear Editors:

Re: Mathew/Crowther/Updike/Amis ("Interaction," IZ 130). The usage "a police" isn't a Martin Amis coinage. It's used often throughout David Simon's *Homicide: A Year on the Killing Streets* (1991), basis for the excellent TV series *Homicide: Life on the Streets*. Since it's a true-crime book, I assume it's true-slang and therefore legitimate.

By the way, I assume Gary Westfahl's series of splenetic articles is working up to "David Pringle: Worst Editor in Science Fiction" or maybe "*Interzone*: Sixteen Years of Utter Crap"?

**Kim Newman**

London

**Editor:** And you hadn't even seen Gary Westfahl's article on Geoff Ryman (IZ 131) at the time you wrote that last comment, Kim! Gary assures us he's going to try to be really positive, upbeat, life-affirming, yea-saying – and even, just possibly, *Anglophile* – in his future columns...

Dear Editors:

Issue 123 marked a special milestone for me as it was my personal 100th copy received, having been a faithful subscriber since issue 24. I could not let this event pass without dropping you a line, not to praise *Interzone* to the skies (my continued subscription should indicate my opinion of your magazine) but to reflect on what *IZ* has done for me over the years.

The emphasis has always been on story content and there have been many stories that have stayed with me even from those first few issues. The variety of stories has also been a strong feature; my appreciation of the genre has increased and I now enjoy a wider range of fiction which I would not have otherwise read. Quite aside from introducing me to some excellent authors such as Iain M. Banks, Stephen Baxter, Eric Brown, Kim Newman, the list goes on, your reviews and books-received column



# Interaction + Interaction + Interaction +

have led me to some real gems. If I do not get around to reading all the stories or articles before the next month's issue reaches me it is usually because I am buried in a book recommended by your team of reviewers.

These things above all keep me buying *IZ* but there are other reasons. "Ansible Link" is usually the first page I turn to, as do many other subscribers I suspect. And a brief word to Robert Lettman ("Interaction," issue 122): if I understood 50% of David Langford's column when it was first printed I thought I'd done rather well. But it is one of those things that comes with practice, the more you read the more you understand, the more you understand the more you enjoy, the more you enjoy the more you read, etc., etc.

I live in hope that writers I particularly enjoyed in previous issues will contribute again. We have not heard anything from Susan Beetlestone for a long time; perhaps she is busy with other projects, and I shall always be on the lookout for anything new by her. But there is one thing I shall never forgive you for. It was you who infected me with Pratchett-itis way back in my first issue (no. 24) when you printed an extract from *Wyrd Sisters*. Since then I have passed on this virus to several friends and my brother-in-law, and last Christmas my bookshelf exploded when I tried to squeeze *Hogfather* into my personal Discworld collection.

If there is anything I would like to see more of it would be more stories from far afield, and no, Greg Egan does not count! I mean stories from countries other than the UK, USA, NZ and Oz. Yes, I know you can only print what you receive, but in the past stories from non-English speaking countries have been particularly interesting and should be encouraged. I would also like to see the occasional piece of poetry published.

Thank you for an interesting and entertaining 100 issues. I hope I am still reading *Interzone* when it reaches issue 233.

**Trevor C. Baker**  
Stevenage

**Editor:** Thanks for the generous praise, and apologies for publishing your letter so belatedly. As it happens, we have been looking seriously at foreign-language stories just recently – German, French, Polish, and from other nations. You should be seeing some here very shortly. Also, we have just received a story, her first after several years' silence, from Susan Beetlestone, and we were delighted to discover she is still writing. As for poetry, no, we don't think so: there are a thousand-and-one small magazines

*dedicated to verse, while our purpose is to be a prose fiction monthly...*

Dear Editors:

Just a quick note with regard to Paul J. McAuley's review of Elizabeth Hand's *Glimmering* (*IZ* 126), in which he refers to her first two novels which were set in an sf scenario (a future Washington DC after a series of catastrophes) but were narrated with the cadences of fantasy.

There are, in fact, three novels in that series, although in the third the language used to tell the tale is less explicitly fantasy-based. The volume, *Icarus Descending*, didn't – as far as I can make out – appear in the UK. For anyone interested, I obtained my copy from a second-hand book dealership in the States via the internet. A credit card is the instant way of doing this; carriage can be expensive, but surface mail is a lot cheaper provided you don't mind the wait.

It may, of course, have appeared briefly on the shelves in the UK and vanished, which brings me to a point made in "Interaction" some months ago by David Burrows and enlarged upon in an editorial postscript. The Flamingo edition of M. John Harrison's *The Course of the Heart* was filed in our local Waterstones under general fiction. A neutral cover (i.e., no monsters from Mars, spaceships or alien landscapes) seemed to dictate this – so a trawl through the mainstream shelves is a useful undertaking.

Better yet, if you know what you want, order it. Much kinder to the blood-pressure than all that impotent railing when you discover that the science-fiction and fantasy niche is being hogged yet again by big-selling 17-volume sword-and-sorceries.

**Ann Acaster**  
Maidstone

Dear Editors:

Paul Brazier's interview with *Doctor Who* writer Paul Cornell (*IZ* 125) got me laughing a dark, gallows kind of laugh, especially when Cornell said, "I actually don't know about book sales. I'm a bit too English to ask."

Right. Pull the other one.

But it was the claims to writerly excellence and status that had me gnawing on the rug. No, sorry, but this is commercial product we're talking about here, and those who write it are, basically, agents of the corporate machine engaged in show business for a target audience. As the mighty Norman Spinrad said:

"Show. Business. Show business. People in show business are in the business of putting on a show. The purpose of putting on a show it to make money. The show that attracts the most customers will make the

most money. Therefore one studies the demographics. What kind of show attracts which consumers? What imagery can we key into that is already implanted in the mass consciousness? What plot sequences exert the maximum appeal? What story elements build audience loyalty? What's the best identification figure to use?"

So, please, Mr Cornell, don't hand us some line about postmodern fan irony. We know that you're just chewing gum that another 30 or 40 people have already had in their mouths. And when it's passed on to us, we're expected to lick our lips, drool a bit, and get chomping on that 30-year-old wad, aren't we?

**Mike Cobley**  
Glasgow

**Paul Brazier comments:** I felt obscurely insulted when I read the above, even if the attack seems to be entirely on Paul Cornell. But finally I realized that the attitude displayed is the same as mine was before I had read any of the *Virgin Doctor Who* novels – I had assumed they would be recycled garbage too. Actually reading some of the novels, however, led me to discover a new and fresh fiction that, while not great literature, was not impossibly shallow either. Paul Cornell is the prime exponent of this, and his quality as a writer is being proved by his continuing to be employed as one. Norman Spinrad is a nice man with a lot of insight, but even he isn't necessarily right about everything. The definition of show business Mike Cobley quotes, while rightfully scathing about much of the product of Hollywood and most television, ignores the 5-10% or so of the output of any entertainment medium that is true, good-hearted, and new, but that would never be seen without the recycled pap that gives it a context and a medium of expression. Sturgeon's Law – 90% of sf is crap, but then 90% of everything is crap – holds true regardless of volume. If you published a thousand books a year, 900 would be rubbish. But if you tried to publish only the hundred good ones, 90 of them would still be crap. All Spinrad's dictum tells us is how that 90% is achieved most efficiently. The *Doctor Who* books appear to have been generated almost entirely from within *Dr Who* fandom – and we all know fan-writers do it because they love it, not because they want to make money. The result is the same as if Spinrad's rules had been applied, though. It seems to me that if we want a reasonable quantity of quality work we have to accept that there will be a concomitantly huge outpouring of trash, and rely on our noses and our critics to sort it all out for us.



# THAT THING OVER THERE

Dominic Green



**I**t was the summer of 2001, Year One, as all the MTV broadcasts proudly announced. And yes, I hear you sniggering behind your cybernetic replacement hands when I say “MTV,” just as I sniggered at my grandfather when he said “gramophone” instead of “CD.” But despite our appearance now, we were all young then, and On Top of the World. Literally.

The Chinese Government had recently decided to allow expeditions into the Khabachen district of the Qinghai Autonomous Region, Tibet in all but name, an area that had previously been politically sensitive due to the destruction by the government of several large monasteries. The monasteries had been built there due to the elevation and seclusion of the place, well away from everything apart from poor people (who get everywhere) and *yeh-teh*, that peculiar high-country word which means, literally, “That Thing Over There,” and refers to a thing that walks on two legs like a man, but is not. The monastic authorities had chosen well. The Khabachen valley was situated on a plateau which had been produced when the lava of ten volcanoes, now extinct, filled a high valley dammed by ice. In this respect, it was very much like the rest of the Tibetan plateau, only higher. The medical authorities in England recommended that we all spend a month in Lhasa acclimatizing to the effects of high altitude; Chinese government advisors counselled a further two months

in Lhasa in state-provided apartments, which, I was later to discover, cost ten times as much as the equivalent ethnic-minority accommodation, 50 per cent of which went to actual Tibetans, and 40 per cent of which went to that peculiar place to which percentages disappear in China.

The five monasteries in the area had been built by a subdivision of the Tibetan buddhist faith known as the Brown Hat Sect, a group about which our contacts in the relatively modern Yellow Hat ruling sect could provide little information, and which was said to have been a transparent front for the continued practice of Bon-poba, the original and faintly unpleasant religion of the Tibetan plateau. The Brown Hatters had been repeatedly purged for claiming to have been present in the highlands before the arrival of Padmasambhava, and to be the guardians of a place where an entire country of demons had been exorcised by the drivers of the Great Vehicle. Good ordinary Buddhists were cautioned against approaching the area with tales of *yeh-teh*. In much the same way, perhaps, good ordinary present-day Communists have been discouraged from approaching Chinese army bases with stories of radioactivity and live ammunition practice.

According to legend, Nyatri Tsanpo, the first King of Tibet, had fought a great battle with cunning sorcerers here a thousand years ago, and had forced them back





Illustrations by Dominic Harman

to this highland region, where they were finally destroyed, but not before their lord sorcerer, the wicked Nyiga Gedgyiniges, had worked a great spell which froze 10,000 of their army into stone statues, awaiting the time when they would march down once more and make war upon the world. This story had been written by a ninth-century buddhist chronicler – it had happened a thousand years ago then, too – and it was evident that he had heard much of the Terra Cotta Army of the tomb of the Yellow Emperor of Qin China. It was possible that the chronicler, upon hearing of the Army and its similar intended function, had wished to curry favour with the powerful Chinese factions that have always been part of the Tibetan landscape, and to make clear, of course, that the idea had been had by Tibetans first. In any case, the prospect of discovering another Terra Cotta Army was not absent from our minds as we drove into the highlands to set up our base camp.

Satellite photographs, computer-enhanced using techniques previously only available to the military to bring out straight-line details such as walls and roads, already told us that traces of man-made structures existed in the high Khabachen valley, and that, furthermore, Mon Sa, the Tibetan village at which we had been instructed we could set up our Base Camp by the Chinese government, had previously existed in no less

than three separate shifting locations. Driving into the village, our architectural expert, Chak Kuang, identified two earlier settlements placed by Tocharian and Chi'ang Tibetan cultures. The present inhabitants, living in metal-and-plastic communes built from materials obviously transported from lower altitudes, were the descendants of Tibetan lowlanders driven up here by recent forcible land appropriations by Han Chinese. No wonder, then, that our hosts pointed wildly up the mountains and told us that an army of *yeh-teh* existed just over the hill. We could not investigate this, of course, as "just over the hill" was still vertically the distance from Tower Bridge to Westminster, and looked, furthermore, unattainable for any vehicle not possessing fur and four legs; but we contented ourselves with the thought that, if there was an army of frozen sorcerers up there, they would stay frozen another day beyond a thousand years.

About halfway through the evening of the first night, however, our specialist, Janine Groening, burst in a highly agitated state into the prefab hut which we were occupying. I remember her grabbing my arm and dragging me outside.

She claimed to have discovered the third location of Mon Sa; an ancient, loess-covered structure only a few inches down in the soil, constructed of what she insisted was the same poured concrete used by the Roman



Empire for the production of its major architecture. Now, it was not quite as beyond the bounds of possibility as one might think for a Roman cultural outpost to have existed in Tibet; the Parthian Empire had captured 10,000 Roman soldiers at the battle of Carrhae in 53 BC, and resettled them on its considerable borders, which had abutted Han Chinese borders in many places following the Han conquest of the Tarim Basin. However, I could not quite lend credence to such a radical reinterpretation of history, and indeed, upon re-examination of the stonework, Janine was forced to conclude that the masonry was not Roman, for it was made of standardized non-cuboid blocks which tessellated in three dimensions. Whatever stresses acted on this masonry would meet with resistance in no matter which way they pushed.

Furthermore, the walls appeared to possess rusted reinforcing iron staples driven completely through them, in the way in which fanciful theory would have the Incas building Quito. The rusting of the staples had been retarded by the fact that, like the ones that hadn't been discovered in Quito, they appeared to have been plated with silver.

At this point we were simultaneously both tremendously excited and extremely wary, particularly of our Communist hosts, for there were entire Viking armies full of axes to grind concerning preternaturally advanced civilizations being discovered on the Tibetan Plateau. No doubt, we joked with one another as we worked to uncover the walls, we would also find perfectly preserved specimens of Peking Men wearing Chinese Army uniforms. Therefore, our preliminary investigations were confined to searching the entire structure minutely for traces of chocolate-bar wrappers and cigarettes. We were most excited by the prospect of finding something still more impressive on the other side of the hill; if the other side of the hill had proven to hold a previously undiscovered monastery, or a boring old settlement, we would at that juncture had been terribly disappointed. However, it did not, and we weren't.

We started out extremely early in the morning, at around five, in order to catch the Chinese secret policemen even Chak Kuang was convinced were busy up there with their scaffolding and mechanical diggers. The trail was harder than if it had been set with nails, and our lungs felt as if they were filled with white hot hydrazine. Our faces were ghost-pale with sun-block factor  $n$ . Being up in the Tibetan highlands was the nearest a common man of my century could come to being in outer space. The sky up there grows purple, rather than red, in the evening, I swear it. If you whirl your hand through the air, there is no air there. Now, I am too old to travel on orbital transports; no company will insure me, with such a weak heart. But once I stood on the threshold of the stars.

We stood on the crest of the hill, and, ours being a multiracial party, swore in seven languages simultaneously. There, on the saddle between two mountains, stood an entire city never seen before by Western Man – the city we were to come to call Voorniin.

Eastern Man had been here before, of course; we found a Chinese Kilroy Was Here inscription on the western pillar of the great gate, still standing after how-

ever many thousand years. It was modern, of course, but quite old; some soldier had been up here with a motorized battalion, perhaps in the early 1950s, the days of territorial confrontation between China and India. It stood right next to a second inscription from the first Han Dynasty. Those two soldiers had visited this city a thousand years apart, and no other soul except perhaps the odd Tibetan yak-herd had struggled up here during all that time. Neither soldier had truly known what he was seeing.

The walls were built of the same queer interlocked blocks. The streets, as we moved in through the great iron gate, were paved and pavemented and possessed closed sewers. There had at some point been glass in all the windows. Zanskar, a thousand miles to the south, and perhaps the world's one remaining nation which can claim to be aboriginally Tibetan in its culture, possesses one pane of glass in its entire 200-mile extent, and that one in the palace of a king. Here we were finding glass panes in the houses of the poor; and in every house we found the *yeh-teh*.

The corpses were many, and mummified by the high altitude, aridity and cold in a way that an Egyptian pyramid full of refrigerators would never have been able to achieve. They still had their hair, which was a uniform ashen white, as if the hair of those who in life had been blondes and brunettes had grown silver in a thousand years of post-mortal ageing up here on the mountainside while they waited for us to come.

They had a written language, which seemed to be alphabetic. However, once this single similarity was dispensed with, it appeared to have no connection whatsoever with even the oldest of Tibetan scripts. They wove cloth in volumes which suggested they possessed looms, and indeed in airy stone chambers just off the main thoroughfare we found a great battery of such devices. They had hypocausts and copper piping connecting every room. In one high tower at the extreme northern end of the city we discovered a lacquered wooden tube containing two smashed lenticular pieces of glass, suggesting an acquaintance with telescopes and astronomy. Constellations were found drawn all over the domed ceiling of one chamber, along with a wooden astrolabe, all of this wood obviously having required to be transported here from some considerable distance. The constellations looked like nothing known to man, with the exception of Scorpio, which I recognized immediately; I remembered having read in a book long ago that Scorpio was one of the few constellations whose stars had not moved markedly relative to the Sun since Ptolemy's original classification, so that its present-day form was still similar to the form it had taken before the birth of Christ.

It was at that point that Angela Reinicke, our paleo-anthropologist, was discovered sitting holding a corpse's wrist, as if taking its pulse, staring mutely down at the hand.

It was not only that the corpse had five fingers and one thumb, nor even that the other hand was exactly the same. Mutations of this sort, although uncommon, were not impossible, after all. It was the fact that the last six corpses she had checked had also had the same characteristics. I, too, had had a weird feeling every time I had passed one of the frozen corpses, but, like the four



fingers on Mickey Mouse, it had been a thing which one noticed without realizing why it seemed wrong.

We had been so busy flabbergasting ourselves with what could be found inside the walls that we failed to concern ourselves with what might lie outside them. However, the sound of Janine Groening calling from the scree-littered slopes beyond the city drew us out of the gate.

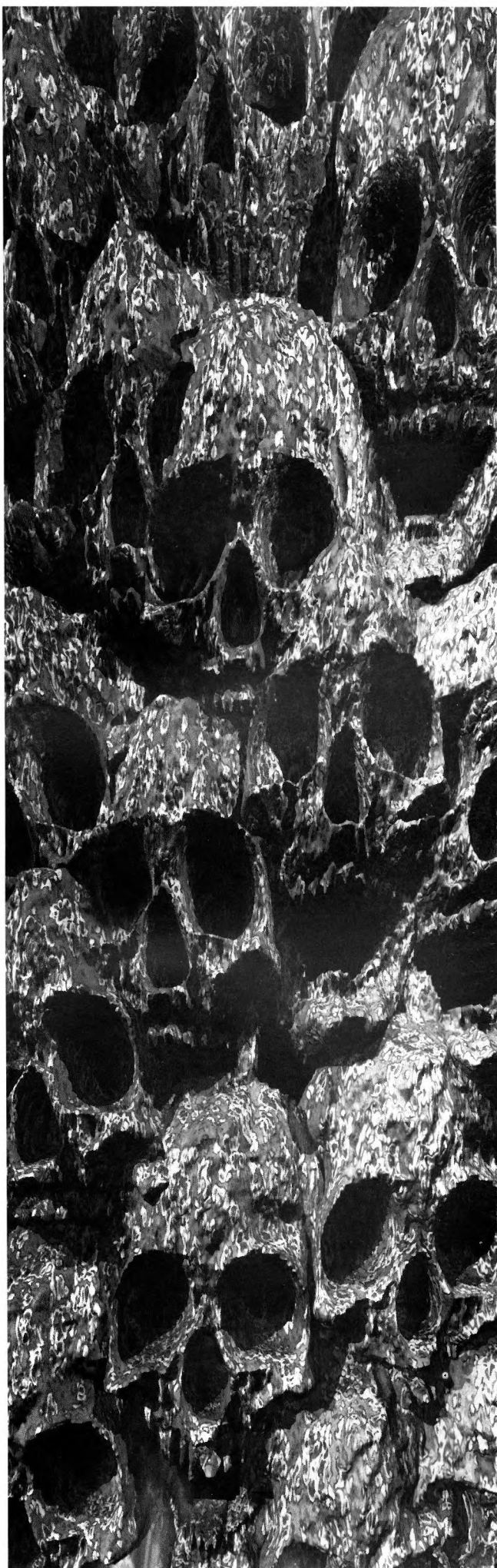
She had found a metal arrowhead embedded in the mortar of an outlying wall, inscribed with primitive symbols familiar from grave finds from the Ch'iang culture of pre-Buddhist Tibet. This in itself was the first truly significant find of the day, which may sound odd; but to an archaeologist a city totally unrelated to any culture found before is an exasperating quantity until he has some external evidence with which to paste it into the palimpsest of Time. Now we knew that these people, whoever they had been, had come into conflict with the Ch'iang culture, which could be dated back as far as 4,000 BC until the time of the Yarlung Dynasty of the European Dark Ages. Now we had a temporal box into which to put our culture – albeit a very big one.

We also found bodies outside the walls, after a cursory search; bodies in rough but workmanlike military graves, many dressed in Tibetan peasant robes that hadn't changed much in the 2,000 years between then and now. You must understand that in those days polyester was almost unknown in Tibet. They appeared to have been buried with military honours, which in their cases amounted to messages in Greek and Sanskrit scripts – at that time both quite widely-used languages in Bactria, to the south-west of the Tibetan plateau – scratched into rough headstones. We were surprised to find not only Sanskrit dedications, but also some in the *Wen-yan* Chinese script, and a single headstone written in the rarely-found Tocharian language, an Indo-European tongue known to have once been spoken in what is now Western China. This last was a particularly interesting find, for it proved that the Tocharian-speaking peoples (as opposed to the Tocharian peoples themselves, who were of course Completely Different) had existed in the Western Regions around 200 years before their previous supposed first colonization of the area. All these peoples, it seemed, had come all the way up into these highlands which it had taken us 30 days to penetrate using modern motor vehicles, and fought, sustaining terrible casualties, against the people of the walled city. We counted 20,000 grave markers in all.

However, it was the words spelled out in Chinese on Janine's arrowhead that sent a chill down our spines – and at those altitudes, it takes a lot to send a chill down already frozen vertebrae.

The words were DEATH TO DEMONS.

At first we imagined that these widely differing armies had been fighting each other for the great prize of the city. After examination of the ruins of siegeworks and collapsed supply-tunnels all about the city, however, we realized that all these many thousand soldiers had come all this way up here as a unified, multinational force purely in order to confront the city's inhabitants and kill them. This would have had to have been a most single-minded enterprise, for some of these soldiers must have



come from the environs of modern-day China, and the gear and clothing of soldiers found in certain graves suggested that a Hsiung-Nu force had accompanied the Chinese detachment. Cementing an alliance between the nomad Hsiung-Nu and the Chinese would have been a feat well nigh impossible at that time, for the Qin Dynasty were shortly to involve themselves in walling off the entire continent from their nomadic neighbours, such was the enmity between them. Chak Kuang, for one, refused to believe that the troops of this army could have originated in China. To move such a body of men and weapons over a thousand miles beyond the Chinese border through heaven alone knew how many petty warlords' sovereign territories would have required a co-operation from the Tibetan people never since seen in the history of these two nations, plus the presence of an enemy mutually threatening enough to move both peoples to join forces against it.

Due to the Burning of the Books by Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi, little record survives of that early period of Chinese history, almost as if the Emperor had wanted to hide some dramatic or traumatic event. Perhaps this act of genocide against a peaceful, hill-dwelling people had been an episode in his reign which had excited adverse comment. After all, how much remains to us of the ancient Chavin or Nazca cultures from before the time of the Inca? And how much truly-related European history would have survived had the Nazis won at El Alamein and Stalingrad? Can we be sure that the history which did survive those two battles is entirely unblemished?

It was at that point that we noticed that an assumption we had made regarding the pre-death ages of the corpses was sorely mistaken. We had assumed that all the bodies found in the city had simply been those of the aged and decrepit, who had been left behind at home when the city's men and womenfolk went to war. However, the discovery of a small and silver-haired child in one of the many temples put paid to that theory. It seemed on subsequent reanalysis of the bodies that, queer as it might have seemed, every single inhabitant of the city had been an albino. Possibly, we reasoned, the superficially strange appearance of the city's people had inspired their lowland neighbours to attack them.

However, it was judged that the position of the child's body, on the temple altar with no less than 13 exquisitely-crafted steel daggers driven through its vital organs, was a more likely cause of enmity. Over 60 further small skulls were found neatly stacked on a rotating spiked drum, oddly reminiscent of a newsagent's book stack, at the rear of the temple. And yes, they had had steel. Steel swords were in the minority, however; instead, we discovered paranoiacally extensive armouries of huge steel darts which could be linked by chains and fired from simultaneously-triggered ballista-type devices mounted on the walls, perfectly preserved in the waterless Tibetan air. The sinew-and-tendon ropes used to power the catapults had split and rotted in the cold, but otherwise many of the weapons almost seemed as if they might still be serviceable today – when I say today, of course, I mean yesterday, in the first years of this ageing century. The number of Chinese, Tibetan, Persian, Tartar and Tocharian soldiers found dead and buried outside the walls with leg

injuries bore witness to the ballistae having been highly effective in their heyday. However, despite the much-trumpeted effectiveness of Asiatic compound projectile weapons, the number of war casualties found buried close to the city walls was far lower than the huge quantity of uninjured corpses found in and around the camp of the besiegers. Many of the exhumed soldiers had toes and fingers missing, a fact which pointed to the ill state of preparation of their armies in ascending to such a frigid altitude.

The city-dwellers' way of life had been violent and unpleasant – there appeared to have been no room for failure in what we were soon to come to call Niige society, and graphic depictions of incompetent high officials being ignominiously cast into pits of wolves and tigers abounded. Their society was a democracy, one of the few ever found independently of the Greek model; but non-Niige were not allowed to vote. They were, however, allowed to die, and Tibetan, Hsiung-Nu and Chinese slaves farmed the fields and mined the mines. When the miners died, the unnecessary expense of transporting them to the surface was eschewed; they were cast into an ice cave on the lower levels, where they froze gruesomely into the faces of subterranean waterfalls when the ice flowed over the years. I have not personally visited the ice caves, but the first spelunkers to penetrate down that far were driven to swear they would never venture into the Voornin Mine again.

They mined iron, of course, not gold or silver, although these metals might have also existed high on this igneous plateau. However, they were less plentiful than iron, and less useful; the Niige appeared to have learned the lesson in advance that history is filled with races whose sparkling hoards of gold and silver were plundered by invading hordes of iron-miners. The Niige were, I am convinced, the "Sons of Reflected Light," those semi-mythical creatures who had descended to the Chinese lowlands and contributed to the Qin and Zhou cultures their unfair head start of early knowledge in the fields of medicine, philosophy and magic. And what does one do with a benefactor who demonstrates his superior knowledge to one's dirtbound primitive people? Why, one fears him, and to fear is to hate, and to hate is to destroy.

But there were other reasons why the Chinese and Tibetan inhabitants of that region would have feared and hated the alien culture. These reasons were plastered all over their walls and carved into their caryatid columns in what had once been glorious technicolor. They did not appear to worship gods as such; rather, they appeared to have transcended this meaningless extravagance. What we had at first taken for temples of human sacrifice were in fact anatomical research theatres and chambers for the interrogation of luckless victims taken in battle. Anatomical examinations were carried out with the subject still alive, for preference – a most logical conclusion, since how can any truly conscientious healer truly understand the functioning of a living breathing human, unless he has cut a man up while he is still alive and breathing?

The child in the temple, we were soon to discover, had not been sacrificed, but had instead been the subject of a dissection to determine whether or not Niige War Savants had been able to infect him with a particularly virulent strain of cholera prevalent at that time in the



city. Had he been so infected, say the notes that they had left, they would have contaminated a few more children and hurled them over the walls into the enemy. According to their journals, they had tried the same thing with the corpses of yaks a week or so earlier, only to be disappointed, as yaks seemed not to be sufficiently similar to human beings to communicate the bacillus. Had the small boy been spared due to the efficacy of yaks, the journals tell us, he would have been eaten. Adults, of course, were needed in the fight against the Zuiev, or Non-Niige, whereas children could easily be replaced; and once a child had been allowed to die to prevent a drain on the food bins, it would be a shame to waste such a handy meat supply.

Their word for themselves – their tongue was eventually decoded, with the aid of the two Cray computers run by the BABEL project in Los Angeles and reference to Elamite, a language isolate from ancient Mesopotamia – means, quite simply, “Us.” Their word for anyone who was not “Niige,” “Us,” was “Zuiev.” This term was at best contemptuous, and at worst had the same register which one would use to describe a trained animal. The Niige’s ancestors had originated in the lowlands south of the Himalaya, a land called by them Adamdi; having been persecuted by numerous kings for unspecified religious practices, they had then fled to the northern uplands where they had served the Bon priests of Tibet as jewellers and brewers, bringing with them trades their people had presumably learned in Mesopotamia. However, with the birth of the first true Niige child – an event the Bon had interpreted as an evil omen, and the Niige’s ancestors as a sure sign of the favour of the gods – local opinion had turned gradually against the southerners, and they had been forced still further into the highlands, where they had taken great pride in constructing a city where no city should have been able to be built. However, this had not been the end of their misfortunes, for, alarmed at the thought that the city of the Bai Ch’iang, the “White Tibetans,” was flourishing and was, furthermore, now termed the “Black Jewel of the Mountains,” the neighbouring kings of Qin, and the chieftains of the Hsiung-Nu, Yueh-Chih, and Ch’iang, decided jealously to march against the Niige. And they brought a great army into the highlands, the greatest that had ever been seen by Man, and laid siege to the City of Voorniin, Beloved of Fate. This last sentence is a verbatim quote from the penultimate passage of a hundred-year history carved into the wall of a city whose stone blocks were hacked bodily out of granite by a people possessing little more than the hands on the ends of their arms.

This penultimate passage should be tragic, and it would have been, like the Hittite inscriptions on the coming of the Sea Peoples which break off in mid-sentence, had it not been for the fact that it *was* the penultimate passage. The last passage had been carved by a firm, unshaking, absolutely self-assuredly deliberate six-fingered hand, and went as follows:

“Witness my hand these one hundred and seventeen years past the foundation of the City of the Chosen; I, Rezadrakedel, philosopher and counsellor to our nation, take it upon myself to ensure the survival of our seed. Therefore, I decree that, like wasps in winter, we shall take ourselves to the insides of our houses and die, for



*there shall come a time when we shall rise again."*

That phrase – “philosopher and counsellor” – has been translated as “priest-king,” and even “warrior-prophet,” by some of the more sensational newspapers. However, as I have said before, the Niige had no priests. They were not scared even of Heaven. The phrase “Gediniyezal,” from which the English has been translated, means something between “knower” and “advisor.” Rezadrakedel had been no priest. He had been a scientist, or the closest thing to one that any Iron Age city could produce; and one of the hobbies of scientists is the prediction of future scientific advancement. Rezadrakedel had doubtless seen many innovations and advancements in his 70-year lifespan, especially when one considers that his city’s entire history had only spanned a hundred years. He must also have known that summer never came to the high plains where the City was situated, and that its inhabitants must needs trade iron and bright worthless stones with the peoples of the warm valleys on all sides in order to obtain food, playing one ethnically prejudiced despot against another. Indeed, it appeared to have been only the alliance of these despots in the assault upon the City that brought the Niige to their unaccustomed kneeling position, for the mighty defences of Voornin’s curtain walls do not appear to have been much dented by the puny forces that their primitive attackers were able to drag up the mountain with them.

It is, of course, well nigh impossible to raise proper siege engines to such an altitude. The fact that the Niige themselves appeared to have managed it, and to have housed entire batteries of such devices within their city walls, is immaterial. The Niige died of starvation, not of sword-wounds; they had known they were about to be forced into surrender by diminishing food reserves, and had so inscribed bad-loser curses in the names of nebulous Bon and Elamite demons in whom they no longer believed all round the gateways of their stronghold, and had committed businesslike suicide, allowing their enemies to enter the city and butcher all who had not obeyed the philosopher/counsellor’s decree. And the butchers had been thorough – old Chinese inscriptions found on the wall of a deep well by one wall of the stronghold announce that three Niige survivors had been discovered attempting to hide down here and were “killed immediately.” Not tortured. Not buried alive. But “killed immediately.” Like lepers. Like a virus that might spread down from the mountains and infect the human race.

The Chinese and Tibetan warlords had been foresighted enough to realize that here the Gods had been kind enough to place a terrible threat to the security of their kingdoms in a location where it could grow only very slowly, and could be effectively dealt with using sufficiently single-minded force. Rezadrakedel, however, had perhaps been even wiser. As a scientist, he knew that Men could think of new ways to tackle almost any problem, and he had doubtless seen primitive aboriginal Zuiev bow down in wonder before the splendours of his high City and proclaim them to be nothing short of sorcery. Why, then, should things thought of as sorcery by his own kind not also come to pass one day?

Rezadrakedel might have observed, as did Roger Bacon in medieval England, that slave bodies thrown

into the corpse pits in the mines did not spoil. He might have looked to the limitations of even his own scalpel-sharp brain. He might have considered that, *astounding though it might sound that the frozen corpses of his people might one day be found and restored to life*, it was not beyond the bounds of possibility. A race of men might one day exist who were to him technologically as he was to a Zuiev peasant; a race of men who might be stupid enough to dig up his entire people, resurrect them, and let them loose again upon the world. Is it a coincidence that the most perfectly-preserved of the corpses discovered at Voornin were those of Niige aristocrats who threw themselves into a deep pit on top of a hundred slave corpses, and then had a thousand gallons of water poured down onto their bodies when the main water butt that supplied the entire mine was deliberately broken by Zuiev slaves?

I have stood on a man-made tower on the shoulders of a mountain range so high that for an ordinary human being to struggle up to it is akin to a deep-sea anglerfish swimming upriver and hurling itself up Alpine waterfalls like a salmon. And that tower had been built by people over 200 years before the birth of that man the Romans nailed to History as an arbitrary milestone, Christ. People – but not humans. If they’d been human, they would surely never have shone so brightly in a place where even a struck match has trouble burning.

Oh, they had human DNA all right; there was of course an initial “Pack-Yaks of the Gods” period of insistence by bearded lunatics that the Niige had been Alien Thetans from Outer Space, but this had been dispelled semi-instantly by the very first tests of genetic material brought down from Voornin, “The Place Where We Live.” The genetic tests proved that the genetic basis for the Niige had indeed been human, and that they had possessed a genetic structure 90-odd per cent identical to that of humans. However, so does a mountain gorilla. It was quite quickly realized that there was something new about the Niige – headlines screamed such things as “Asiatic Super City Found on Tibetan Plateau,” “Beijing Claims Chinese Descended From Proto-Tibetans,” and “Baghdad Claims Supermen Still Live in Mesopotamia.” The race was on to identify one’s ancestry with a people whom, paradoxically, one’s ancestors had been attempting only a couple of thousand years previously to exterminate with extreme prejudice.

And then the news came from laboratories in Switzerland that sperm cells had been discovered still alive in Niige corpses.

The discovery was natural enough; frozen mammoths had been dug up in Siberia, and certain deranged scientists had insisted that it was now possible to clone a mammoth as a consequence. When “ice men” had been discovered frozen in the passes of the Alps, equally differently sane women had written to the authorities responsible to insist that they be allowed to have Cro-Magnon Babies through modern genetic technology. Now, however, what had been dug up was not a Neanderthal, but a putative Superman, and modern genetic technology had moved 20 years further on. Rich women flocked to the inevitable spate of discreet clinics in their thousands as frozen sperm samples went missing from bio



labs and museums. The demand for albino and polydactyloid sperm in normal workaday sperm banks, meanwhile, went unaccountably ballistic. Within two years, the number of albino inhabitants of Beverly Hills had multiplied tenfold as divorced old actresses bore superbeings like breed cows. Everything in our society could be sold then, even frozen jism hacked from a dead man's gonads.

But were the things they were birthing supermen? Evolutionists have never argued that there is such a thing as a superior or inferior species, only one more or less well adapted to prevailing conditions which may change at any time. Certainly the Niige seem better adapted to succeed under present conditions than we do; over the past few years we have seen their children going through High School, West Point and Harvard, attaining PhD's, knighthoods, and Nobel Prizes with effortless ease.

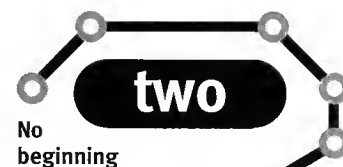
It's been stated that they have superior pattern-recognition skills, superior all-round cognitive ability, enhanced this, hyperevolved that. However, as I hear such explanations I cannot help recalling the thousand-year-dead face of the little boy torn apart upon the altar. Can it not simply be that the Niige have always possessed little or no concern for life of any sort? Was the strength of will to push human beings to their almost certain deaths in the name of experimentation not an immense benefit to the researches of Nazi scientists at Auschwitz? Is "success at any price" not always going to defeat "success tempered with compassion" in any enterprise?

I have submitted this manuscript to a number of national newspapers. All of them are owned by Niige. Short of publishing the document on the Web, I see little hope of ever seeing it reach a wide audience. Am I voicing the same concerns, perhaps, as were voiced by old-money Weimar Berliners who looked from their crumbling mansions to see successful *nouveau riche* Jews and homosexuals strutting round the Unter Den Linden? Only history will tell.

Rezadrakedel, who was discovered in an ice-chunk of great size at the very bottom of the mine, was removed and shipped inside his watery grave to New York in a refrigerated container. I pay my reduced fare every morning on the subway to go and see him. Somehow, he contrived to die with his eyes open, and though his eyes must surely have dried and cracked to unusable blisters in his face before the ice of the cave closed over him, they still stare out from under a foot of ice at parties of schoolchildren gawping at his silver hair and perfectly-preserved fine garments. Although I can see from my reflection in the ice surface that I have grown old in the interim, the Gediniyezal has not aged a day. The surface of the ice has been cut flat and polished using specially-developed techniques, and there is a red dot on the museum floor where visitors may stand and ensure that Exhibit 234A, Rezadrakedel, warrior-prophet of Voorniin, is looking them straight in the eye.

And, despite the fact that it must be fearfully cold in there, the old bastard is smiling.

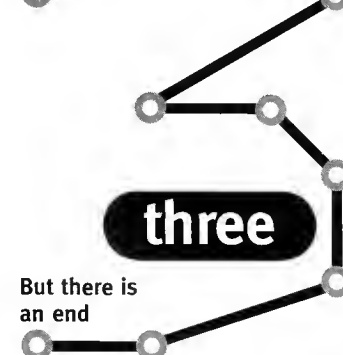
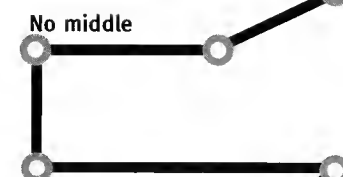
**Dominic Green** last appeared here with "Queen of the Hill" (issue 130), which followed four earlier stories for *Interzone*. He lives in Milton Keynes, and has completed at least two unsold novels.



The novel for  
the internet  
about London  
Underground by

**Geoff Ryman**

<http://www.ryman-novel.com>





# Yellow & Red

*Tanith Lee*

## ***From the Diary of Gordon Martyce:***

*9th September 195—: 7pm*

Coming down to the old house was at first interesting, and then depressing. The train journey was tedious and slow, and after the second hour, over and again, I began to wish I had not undertaken this. But that would be foolish. The house, by the quirkiness of my Uncle's will, is now mine. One day I may even live in it, although for now my job, which I value, and my flat, which I like, keep me in London. Of course, Lucy is terribly interested in the idea of an old place in the country. I could see her eyes, lit by her second gin, gleam with visions of chintz curtains, china on the mantelpiece, an old, dark, loudly-ticking clock. But it is not that sort of house – I knew that even then, never having seen inside it in my life. As for Lucy, I am never sure. She has stuck to me for five years, and so I have not quite given up on the notion of one day having a wife, perhaps a family. Quite a pretty woman, quite vivacious in her way, which sometimes, I confess, tires me a little. Well, if it comes to that, she can do what she wants with the house. It is gloomy enough as it stands.

Beyond the train, the trees were putting on their September garments, brown and red and yellow, but soon a drizzle began which blotted up detail. It was raining more earnestly when I reached the station and got out. I had only one small bag, the essentials for a

stay of a couple of nights, That was good, for there was no transport of any kind.

I walked to the village, and there was given a cup of tea, the keys, and a lift the last mile and a half.

Johnson, the agent, let me off on the drive. He had offered to take me round, but I said this was not necessary. There is a woman, Mrs Gold, who comes in every day, and I was told, she would have put things ready for me – I trusted this was true. The rain eased as I walked along the last curve of the drive.

Presently I saw the house, and recognized it from a photograph I had observed often enough in my Father's study. A two-storey building, with green shutters. Big oaks stood around it that had done the walls some damage, and introduced damp. I supposed they could be cut down. Above, was my Grandfather's weather-vane, which I had never been able, properly, to make out in the photograph, but which my Father told me was in the shape of some Oriental animal deity. Even now, it remained a mystery to me, between the leaves of the oaks and the moving, leaden sky.

I got up the steps, and opened the front door, and stepped into the big dark hall. The trees oppress this house, that is certain, and the old stained glass of the hall windows changes the light to mulberry and spinach. However, I saw through into the sitting room, and a fire had been laid and wood put ready. A touch on



a switch reassured me that the electricity still worked. On the table near the door I found Mrs Gold's rather poorly spelled note. But she had done everything one could expect, even to leaving me a cold supper of ham and salad, apple pie and cheese. She would be in tomorrow at eleven. I need have no fears.

I looked round. I am not fearful by nature. I always do my best, and am seldom in a position to dread very much. A childhood visit to the dentist, perhaps, for an especially painful filling – something of that apprehension seized me. But it was the nasty dark light in the hall. My Uncle died in this house not three months ago. Before him, he had lost his family, his wife and sister, and two sons. Before them another generation had perished. As Shakespeare points out, it is common for people to die.

Going through into the sitting room, I have put a match to the fire. This has improved things. On a sideboard stands a tray with brandy, whisky and soda. Though it is early for me, I shall pour myself a small measure. I gather the boiler is at work, and I can count on a hot bath. I do not want a chill.

*10th September: 2pm*

The house is a mausoleum. Lucy be blowed, I think I shall sell it. Last night was dreadful. Creaks and groans of woodwork, an eldritch wind at the windows – and down the chimneys. I read until nearly two am. Then at three I was woken by a persistent owl hooting in the garden trees. I am not a country person. I longed for my warm city flat and the vague roar of traffic.

However, this morning early I went over the place thoroughly, from attic to cellar. There are a great many rooms, more than I should ever want, and the heating would be prohibitive. It is very old fashioned, those thick, bottle-green and oxblood curtains favoured by our grandfathers – evidently by mine, and my Uncle William, too – enormous cliffs of furniture, and endless curios, some of them I expect very valuable, from the East – Egypt, India and China. I am not particularly partial to any of this sort of thing. I find the house uncomfortable, both physically – it is cold and damp – and aesthetically.

At about 11.30 the not very punctual Mrs Gold arrived. I was not surprised. Women are generally unreliable. I have learnt this from Lucy. Nevertheless, I commended Mrs Gold on keeping the house clean, which she has more or less done, and on the supper left for me yesterday. She is a large woman, constructed like a figurehead, with severe grey hair. She began, of course, at once to tell me all about my Uncle, and what she knows of my Grandfather before him. She is, naturally, as her class nearly always are, fascinated by details of all the deaths. It was with some difficulty that I got her to resume her work. Going into the library, I then took down some boxes of photographs, and began to go through them, more to pass the time than anything else. The agent is coming tomorrow, to discuss things, or I would have tried to get home today.

The photographs, most of which have dates and names written on the back, are generally displeasing, many the dull, antique kind where everyone stands like a waxwork, as the primitive camera performs its task. My grandfather was a formidable old boy, with bushy whiskers, in several scenes out in some foreign land-

scape, clutching his gun, or his spade, for he had been involved in one or two famous excavations, in the East. Here he had taken his own photographs, some of which had appeared in prominent journals of the day. These, obviously, were not among the general portraits, nor was I especially interested to look them out. My father had been wont to tell me, at length, how Grandfather Martyce had taken the very first photograph inside some remarkable ancient tomb. I had found this, I am afraid, extremely boring, then and scarcely less so now. I have, too, forgotten the location. Lucy has often commented that I am not a romantic. I am glad to say I am not.

Eventually Mrs Gold finished her ministrations, and I went down to learn her wages, which were modest enough. She had put into the oven for me, besides, a substantial hot-pot.

"Your Uncle was very fond of those, I must say," she announced. "He relied on me, once the old cook had retired. Mrs Martyce was often ill, you understand, Miss Martyce too. I had a free hand."

I said something gallant about her cooking. She ignored this.

"It was a great worry," she said, "to see them waste away. First the boys, and then the sister and the wife. Your Uncle was the last to go. He was very strong, fought it off, so to speak. The doctors couldn't find anything wrong with him. But it was the same as with the ladies, and the children."

I privately thought that no doubt a reliance on elderly country doctors was to blame here, but I nodded lugubriously, as was apparently anticipated.

"Your Grandfather now," persisted this tragic choric Mrs Gold, glowering on me in the stone kitchen, the pans partly gleaming at her back from her somewhat hard work upon them, "he was the same, but they put it down to some foreign affliction, bad water, those dirty heathen foods. You understand, Mr Martyce – your Uncle, Mr William Martyce, was only in the house a year before he first fell ill. And before that, never a day's *indisposition*." I noted that, not only did she employ words she could not, probably, spell, but that she was also able to invent them.

"It seems an unfortunate house," I said. She appeared to wish me to.

"That's as may be. The cook was never out of sorts, nor any of the maids, while they had them. And I've never had a day in bed, excepting my *parturition*." I assumed she meant childbirth, and kept a stern face. Mrs Gold was certainly most serious. She said, "If I was you, sir, I'd put this house up for sale."

"That might be an idea," I said.

"Not that I want to cause you misgivings."

"Not at all. But it will be too big for me, I'm sure."

When she had gone, I ate the beef sandwiches she had left me, and was grateful her meals were more cheerful than her talk, although I have jotted down here her two interesting words, to make Lucy laugh.

*10th September: 6pm*

I do not like this house. No, I am not being superstitious. I believe there is not a fanciful bone in my body. But it depresses me utterly. The furnishings, the darkness, the chilliness, which lighting all the fires I reasonably can in the sitting room, dining room, my bedroom, the library cannot dispel. And the things which so many

would find intriguing – old letters in bundles, in horrible brown, ornate, indecipherable writing – caskets of incenses and peculiar amulets – such items fill me with aversion. I want my orderly room with its small fire that warms every inch, my sensible plain chairs, the newspaper, and a good, down-to-earth detective novel.

I have already taken to drink – a whisky at lunch, and now another before dinner – and even this went awry. I am not a man who spills things. I have a sound eye and a steady hand. However, sitting over the fire in the library, crouching, should I say, with pure ice at my back, I was looking again at some of the more recent photographs. These comprised a picture of my Uncle and his sons on the lawn before the house, and some oddments of him, pruning a small tree, standing with a group I took to be the local vicar and various worthies of the nearby village. In these scenes, my Uncle is about 40 and again about 50. He looks hale enough, but I had already gathered from the delightful Gold that he was, even then, frequently laid low.

Finally I put the pictures down on the side table, and rested my whisky, half full, beside them. I then stood up to reach for my tobacco. I have often seen Lucy have little accidents like this. Women are inclined to be clumsy, I find, something to do with their physique, probably. In brief, I knocked the table, the whisky glass skidded over it, and upset its contents in four splashes, one on each of the photographs.

I gave a curse, I regret to say, and set to mopping up with my handkerchief. The pictures seemed no worse for the libation, and so I went downstairs to refill my glass. Having looked in on the hot-pot, I decided to give it another half hour, and came back reluctantly upstairs, meaning to try to find some book I could read – my own volume was finished during the early hours this morning. There was not much doing in this line, but at last I found some essays on prominent men, and this would have to serve. Returning to the fire in haste, I there found that each of the photographs on which the alcohol had spilled was blotched with an erratic burn. I must say, I had had no notion malt whisky could inflict such a wound, but there, I am not a photographer.

This annoyed me. Although I have no interest in the photographs particularly, I know my Father would have had one, and for his sake I would not have desecrated them. I am not a Vandal. I feel foolishly ashamed of myself.

I began to think then about my Father and my Uncle William, of how they had lost touch with each other, and how, oddly, we had never been on a visit to this house. One assumes there had come to be a rift between the two men. There was a marked difference in age. Even so, I recall my Father speaking of my Uncle as the former neared his end. "Poor William," he said. "What could I do?" I had not wanted to press him, his heart was giving out.

Irritated, uneasy and out of sorts, I have pushed the damaged photographs together, and come down again, to eat of Mrs Gold's bounty.

*10th September: 10.30pm*

Something very odd. How to put this down... Well, I had better be as scientific as I can. I had forgotten my book, and, deciding on an early bed, since I am feeling rather

fatigued – the country air, no doubt – I came up to the library to collect the volume. It lay on the table and, going to pick it up, I saw again the spoiled photographs.

While I had been downstairs dining, something had gone on. The stains had changed, rather they had taken on a colour, deep swirls of raw red and sickly yellow. This was particularly unpleasant on the black and white surface of the original scenes. I examined each photograph in turn, and all four were now disfigured in this way. I had already resolved that it was no use crying over spilt milk, or whisky, to be more precise, and was about to put them down again, when something else arrested my attention.

Of course, I am aware that random arrangements or marks can take on apparently coherent forms – the "faces" that one occasionally makes out in the trunks of old trees, for example, or the famous Rorschach inkblot test. Yes, the random may form the seemingly concrete, and mean very little, save in the realms of imagination and psychiatry.

However. However – Where the whisky had burned the photographs, a shape had been formed, now very definite, and filled in by rich, bilious colour. Not in fact a shape that I could recognize – yet, yet it was consistent, for in each of the four pictures, it was almost exactly the same. And it was – it is – a horrible shape. Most decidedly that. I do not like it. There is something repulsive, odious, about it. I suppose that is because it is like some sort of *creature* and yet a creature that can hardly, I would think, exist.

Then, I am being rather silly. I had better describe what I see. What is the matter with me?

There, I have had another whisky – I shall certainly have a thick head in the morning! – and I will write this down with a steady hand.

The thing that the whisky has burnt out in the photographs is, in each one, identical, allowing for certain differences of – what I shall have to call – posture, and size. It has the head of a sort of frog, but this is horned, with two flat horns – or possibly ears – that slant out from its head sideways. The body is bulbous at the front and it has two arms or forelegs, which end in paws, resembling those of a large cat. The body ends not in legs, but in a tail like that of a slug. This is all bad enough, but in the visage or head are always two red dots, that give the impression of eyes.

It is a beastly thing. I fear I cannot convey how vile, nor what a turn it has given me.

The varying size of the – what shall I call it? – apparition? – is another matter. I can only conclude the whisky fell in a smaller drop here, a larger there. Although that is not what I recollect quite. It seemed to me my drink had spread in roughly equal splashes on each photograph. But there.

In these two, where my Uncle William prunes the tree, the thing is quite small. But here, where he is in conversation with the vicar and the worthies, it is larger. And here where William is standing with his sons the thing is at its largest.

It is so curiously placed in this view, that it seems to recline at William's very feet, spacing its paws for balance. In relation to the man and boys, it is the equivalent of a medium-sized dog. I cannot escape the illusion that it has not grown bigger, but – got nearer.



That way madness lies.

If there were a telephone here I would put a call through to Saunders, or Eric Smith, even to Lucy. But there is no telephone. Perhaps, a good thing. What would I say?

I know I am behaving in an irrational and idiotic manner. I must pull myself together.

I have put the photographs back on the table and turned them face down. I shall go up and take a couple of aspirins. Obviously, in months to come, I will reread these entries and laugh at them.

*11th September: 11am*

Johnson, the agent, arrived efficiently at ten, and we perfunctorily discussed my plans. I had no hesitation in telling him that I would probably wish to put the house up for sale. I passed a restless night, mostly lying listening to the grim silence of this place. I would have been glad for the creaking of the boards I had heard on my first night, even for the boisterous owl. But both failed me. Everything seemed locked in the cupboard of the darkness, and now and then, like a child, I sighed or moved about, to make some sound.

I got a little sleep for an hour or so after dawn, and came down bleary-eyed but resolved. I had put myself into a foolish state over those confounded burns on the photographs. Perhaps this is the price for allowing myself to become a middle-aged bachelor. No matter. I am going back to London this evening. Back to traffic and fog and lights, and human company if I wish it. I must take myself in hand. I do not want to become one of those querulous neurasthenic fools one reads of. Good God, I have gone through a World War, and although luck put me out of the way of most of the action I was ready enough to do my part. Is some childish horror going to undo me now?

As he was leaving, Johnson recommended that I seek out the vicar. "If you want to know anything about your Uncle's tenancy here, that is."

"Oh, yes. A Reverend Dale, I believe."

"That's right. He's getting on, but pretty spry. A wise old bird."

I said that I might not have the time, but thanked Johnson all the same. What, after all, did I want to know? My Grandfather's forays in the East did not interest me, and all the rest seemed decline, disease, and death. Charming points of conversation – besides, the bubbling Mrs Gold had already rejoiced me with enough of all that.

"Incidentally, Johnson," I said, as I saw him to the door, "I suppose there is some use of photography in your business."

"There is," he agreed.

"I wonder if you've ever heard of – alcohol making a burn on a photograph?"

"Well, I never have," he said. He thought deeply. "It might, perhaps. But not anything pure, I wouldn't have thought."

"Whisky," I said.

"From a still, maybe. Not the stuff in a bottle. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, something a friend told me of."

Johnson shrugged and laughed. "A waste of a good beverage," he said.

When he was gone, I made a decision. It was because I had begun to feel angry.

Mrs Gold was not to come today until three, but she had left me another cold plate. This I tried to eat, but did not really fancy it, although I had had no breakfast.

Eventually I took the largest soup tureen I could find from the kitchen, and the whisky decanter, and went up to the library. The quickest way to be rid of my "monster" was to carry out an experiment. It was quite simple. I would place a selection of photographs in the tureen and pour over them enough whisky to cover them entirely. Either nothing would happen to them, or they would burn – burn all over into yellow and red. And that would be that. No random marks, no possible coincidences of shape. No doubt the pictures that I spoiled underwent some flaw in their reproduction, or there was some weakness in the material on which they were printed. I was confident, to the point of belligerence, that by this means I should be free of the horror I had unwittingly unleashed. As for ruining more photographs, if I did so, there comes a point where one must put oneself first.

I set the tureen down on the big table in the library. Outside, the birds were singing. There was a view of the lawn, and the big oaks, golden and crimson in the dying of the leaves. It is a sunny day.

I took three photographs from the box more or less at random, a scene of my Uncle and his son by the little summer-house, the two boys playing some game under the trees when they were small. To this selection I added one of the former casualties, the photograph of my Uncle pruning the tree. One thing I had made sure of, the three new scenes were of different dates, and had therefore been processed on other paper.

Dropping the four into the bowl, I poured in a generous measure of the whisky. A waste, as Johnson had said.

I have come away to write this, leaving a proper space of time, and now I am going back to look. There will be nothing, I believe, or complete obliteration. I am already beginning to feel I have made an idiot of myself. Perhaps I will tear out these pages.

*11th September: 6pm*

The walk down to the village, just under a mile and a half, took me longer than it should have. I arrived feeling quite done up, and went into the little pub, which had some quaint name I forget, and had a brandy and soda.

Across the green was the vicarage, a picturesque building of grey stone, and behind it the Norman church, probably of interest to those with an historical concern. When I got to the vicarage door, and knocked, a homely fat woman came and let me in, all smiles, to the vicar's den. It was a nice, masculine place, redolent of pipe smoke, with a big dog lying on the hearth, who wagged his tail at me politely.

The Reverend Dale greeted me and called for tea, which the fat nymph presently brought with a plate of her own shortbread. This tasted very good, although I am afraid I could eat no more than a bite.

The vicar let me settle myself, and we talked about ordinary things, the autumn, elements of the country round about, and of London. At last, leaning forward, the old man peered at me through his glasses.

"Are you quite well, Mr Martyce?"

"Perfectly. Just a trifle tired. I haven't slept well at the house."

He looked long at me and said, "I'm afraid people often don't."

I took a deep breath. "In what way?" I asked.

"Your family, Mr Martyce, has been inclined to insomnia there. The domestics have never complained. Indeed, I never heard a servant from there that had anything but praise for the house and the family. Mrs Allen, the former cook, retired only when she was 76 and could no longer manage. She was loath to go."

"But my family – there has been a deal of illness."

"Yes, I'm afraid that is so. Your Grandfather – he was before my time, of course. And his wife. Your father was long from home, and his brother, Mr William, was sent out into the world at 20... before there was any – problem at the house. The two brothers did not at first choose to come back. And your father, I think, not at all. He lived to a good age?"

"He was nearly 80. There was quite a gap between him and William – my Grandfather's travels."

"Eighty – yes, that's splendid. But poor William did not do so well. He was, as you know, only 62 when he succumbed. His wife was a mere 50, and your Aunt in her 40s. But, in later life, she had never been well."

I tried a laugh. It sounded hollow. "That house doesn't seem very healthy for the Martyces."

Reverend Dale looked grave. "It does not..."

"And what explanation do you have for that, sir?"

"I fear that, although I am a man of God, and might be expected to incline to esoteric conclusions, I have none."

I said, flatly, "Do you think there is a malevolent ghost?"

"I am not supposed to believe in ghosts," said the Reverend Dale. "However, I can't quite rid myself of a belief in – *influences*."

A cold tremor passed up my back. I deduce I may have gone pale, for the vicar got up and went over to his cabinet, from which he produced some brandy. A glass of this he gave me – I really must put a stop to all this profligate drinking! I confess I downed it.

"You must understand," he said, "I'm speaking not as a man of the cloth, but simply – as a witness. I've seen very clearly that, in the Martyce family, those who spend much or all of, their time at the house, sicken. Some are more susceptible, they fail more swiftly. Some are stronger, and hold at bay or temporarily throw off the malaise, at first. Your Grandfather lived into his 90s, yet from his 60s he had hardly a day without severe illness. Perhaps, in a man of advancing years, that is not uncommon. And yet, before this time, he was one of the fittest men on record, apparently he put the local youth, who are hardy, to shame. Again, some who aren't strong, also linger in a pathetic, sickly state. Your Aunt was one of these. She succumbed only in her adult years, but then her life was a burden for her. One wondered how she bore with it. Even she, at length..." he sighed. "Her end was a release, I am inclined to think. A satisfactory cause of death meanwhile has never been established. In your Grandfather's case, necessarily it was put down to old age. As with his wife, since she died in her 60s. In the cases of others, death must be questionable. Or unreasonable. As with your Uncle's two sons. They were 14 and 19 years."

"I assumed some childish malady –"

"Not at all. Clemens was their doctor, then. I will reveal, he confided in me somewhat. He was baffled. The same symptoms – inertia, low pulse, some vertigo, headache, an inclination not to eat. But no fever, no malignancy, no defect. You will perhaps know, William's health was poor enough to keep him out of the War. He was utterly refused."

I said, briskly, "Well, I'm leaving tonight."

"I am glad to hear that you are."

"But, I had intended to put the house up for sale –"

"I think you need have no qualms, Mr Martyce. Remember, no one who has lived there, who is not a member of your family, has ever been ill. If anything, the reverse."

"A family curse," I said. I meant to sound humorous and ironic. I did not succeed.

The Reverend Dale looked down upon his serviceable desk.

"I shall tell you something, Mr Martyce. You are, evidently, a sensible man. I can't guarantee my words, I'm afraid. The previous incumbent of the parish passed them on to me. But he was vicar in your Grandfather's time. It seems your Grandfather, always a regular church-goer when at home, asked for an interview. This was about three years after his final return from the East. He was getting on in years, and had recently had a debilitating bout of illness, but recovered, and no one was in any apprehension for him at that time." The vicar paused.

"Go on," I said.

"Your Grandfather it seems posed a question. He had heard, he said, of a belief among primitive peoples, that when a camera is used to take a photograph, the soul is caught inside the machine."

"I've heard of this," I said. "There is a lack of education among savages."

"Quite. But it appears your Grandfather asked my predecessor – if he thought that such a thing were truly possible."

I sat in silence. I felt cold, and wanted another brandy, but instead I sipped my tepid tea.

"What did he say, your predecessor?"

"Naturally, that he did not credit such an idea."

"To which my Grandfather said what?"

"It seems he wondered if, rather than catch a human soul, a camera might sometimes snare... something else. Something not human or corporeal. Some sort of spirit."

Before the eye of my mind, there passed the memory of how my Grandfather had photographed so many exotic things. And of the pictures taken inside the ancient and remarkable tomb. I am not given to fancies. I do not think it *was* a fancy. Like a detective, I strove to solve this puzzle.

I stood up before I had meant to, I did not mean to be rude.

The old man also rose, and the dog. Both looked at me kindly, yes, I would swear, even the dumb animal had an expression of compassion.

"Excuse me," I said, "I have to hurry to be sure of my train."

"You're not returning to the house?" said the Reverend

"No. It's all locked up. The cleaning lady has been and gone. I promised her she'd be kept on until any new tenants take over. They must make their own arrangements."



"I think you have been very wise," said the vicar.

He himself showed me to the door of the stone house. "It's a lovely afternoon," he said. "You look rather exhausted. That cottage there, with the green door. Peter will drive you to the station. Just give him something towards the petrol."

I shook his hand and, like some callow youth, felt near to tears.

In future I must take more exercise. It is not like me to be so flabby. Thank God, Peter was amenable.

I have written all this down in the train. It has not been easy, with the jolting, and once I leaned back and fell fast asleep. I am better for that. I want to make an end of it here, and so return into London and my life, clear of it.

No, I cannot say I know what has gone on. When I put the four photographs into the tureen and poured in the whisky, I thought myself, frankly, an imbecile.

I had left them for perhaps 20 minutes, possibly a fraction longer. I approached the table with no sense of apprehension. Rather, I felt stupid.

Looking in, I saw at once, but the brain needs sometimes an interim to catch up with the quirkiness of the eye. So I experienced a numbing, ghastly dread, but even so I took out the photographs one by one, and laid them on the newspaper I had left ready.

The original had not altered. That is, the photograph, already damaged, of my Uncle by the tree. It had not changed, nor the mark, the yellow and red mark, that had the shape of a horned creature with forelegs and the hind body of a giant slug. There it still was, quite near to him but yet not close. There it was with its blind red dots of eyes, brilliant on the black and white surface of that simple scene.

The other three images are quickly described, and I should like to be quick. The whisky had effected them all only in one place. And in that place, always a different one, exactly similarly. The demon was there. The same. Absolute.

Where the two boys are playing as children, it is some way off, among the trees. It is coiled there as if resting, watching them, like a pet cat.

In the photograph of William and his wife and sister – my Aunt – the thing is much nearer, lying in the grass at their feet again, again like some awful pet.

But it is the last picture, the most recent picture of my Uncle William's younger son, it is *that* one – They are standing by the summer-house. The boy is about 13, and the date on the back, that the whisky has blurred, gives evidence that this is so.

They do not look so very unhappy. Only formal, straight and stone still. That is probably the very worst thing. They should be in turmoil – and the boy – the boy should be writhing, flailing, screaming –

The demon is close as can be. It has hold of the boy's leg. *It is climbing up him.* Its tail is coiled about his knee – Oh God, its head is lying on his thigh. The head has tilted. It gazes up at him. It has wrapped him in its grip. He does not – *he does not know.*

I shall write no more now. I do not want to open this diary again. The lights of London will be coming soon, out of the autumn dusk. Smells of smoke, cooking, and unhygienic humanity. Thank God. Thank God I have got away. Thank God. Thank God.

## ***From a letter by Lucy Wright to her friend J.B.:***

*1st November 195—:*

Your letter did cheer me up a bit, though I cried a bit, after. Yes, I'd love to come for a visit, and it would help to get my mind off – this. Then, I feel guilty. But what can I do? I was totally in the dark. I didn't know. He never confided in me. I don't understand.

I'd always known Gordon was a bit of an old stick-in-the-mud. But he was kind and hard-working, and I did hope he'd get round to popping the question one day. No one else has made any offers. And of course, he was well-off. Not that that was my main reason. But, well, I've never been rich, and it would be nice, not to worry all the time, where the rent's coming from, or if you can afford a new pair of nylons.

The funny thing was, when he came back from that house of his uncle's in the country (and strangely he wouldn't discuss that at all), he couldn't see enough of me. We were out every night, like a couple of 20-year-olds. The pictures, concerts, even dinners in a lovely little restaurant up West. And he made a real fuss of me. He even bought me roses. I thought, this is it. He's going to ask me now. And I thought, I can change him, get him to brighten up a bit. But then well it was a funny thing that happened. It was really silly and – nasty. Peculiar.

It was my birthday – that was the time he gave me the roses – and one of my cousins, Bunty, well she sent me a really lovely present. It was a little camera. What do you expect. I wanted to use it. And one night when Gordon and I were in that nice restaurant, I was showing him the camera, and the manager, who knows Gordon, came up and said, "Let me take a picture of you, Mr Martyce, and your young lady." Well I was a bit giggly – we'd had some lovely wine – and I was all for it, but Gordon got really funny. No, I mean he got really angry, sort of, well – frightened, red in the face – but the manager just laughed, and he took the photograph any way, with me very nervous and Gordon all hard and angry and scared. The manager said Gordon would have to be less camera-shy, for the wedding.

I thought, Gordon's angry because he feels he's being forced to think about that, about getting married. And he doesn't want to. And that depressed me, because things had seemed to be going so well. So it ended up a miserable evening. And he took me home. And – well. That was the last time I saw him. I mean, the last time I *saw* him. Because I don't count the funeral. How can I? They had to close the coffin. Any way. He was dead then. I'm sorry. Look, a tear's fallen in the ink. What a silly girl. Crying over a man that didn't even want me.

Of course, I did speak to him just once more, on the telephone. He rang me up about a week after the dinner, and he said he was going to collect the films – the photographs, you see. And I was glad he'd rung me, so I said yes. I was a bit embarrassed, because the rest of the film was all of my family, dad and mum, and Alice and the babies, and it was the first time I'd taken any photographs, and I was sure they'd be bad.

But then I didn't hear again, and the next thing was the policeman coming round in the afternoon, just as I was trying to get money in that rotten meter that's so stiff. My washing was everywhere – it was Saturday – but he didn't look. He helped me with the meter and then he put me in a chair, and he told me. Gordon had

gone out on the Northern Line and well, you know. He'd fallen under a train. Well, they said, he'd thrown himself under. People had seen him do it. But how can I believe that? I mean, Gordon. It must be a mistake. But then, where was he going? He doesn't have any relatives, and no friends out that way. Didn't have. Well.

But I was so glad to get your kind letter. You see, I went round to Gordon's flat this afternoon, they let me, because there were a few things of mine there, a couple of books I tried to get Gordon to read – I don't think he did – and some gloves I'd left, little things – oh, and a casserole dish I'd bought him. It was a nice one. I thought I'd better have it, now.

And on the table in his room, there were the photographs. The police had obviously been there, because things were a bit disturbed, not the way Gordon would have left them. But the odd thing was, these photographs were lying on a newspaper and they'd stuck to it, so they must have got wet. And – there was a strong smell of whisky, as if he'd spilled some. Maybe he had. He'd been drinking more lately, more than I'd known him do. I remember he said something strange – something about using a spirit to show a spirit. But he was always too clever for me.

Any way, I did look at the photographs, and I wondered if I could take them home, but I wasn't sure, so I didn't, though I can't see that they'll be any help to the police or anyone. Actually, I hadn't done too badly for a beginner. The ones of the babies are really nice, though I'd made Alice look a bit fat, and she wouldn't like that. The last one was the one the manager at the restaurant took of Gordon and me, and it was really a pity. I admit,

it made me cry a bit. Because, it would have been nice to have a picture of him and me together, something to remember him by. It wasn't just that we looked really daft – me all grinning and silly, and Gordon so puffed up and upset. No, there was this horrible big red and yellowish mark on the picture – I suppose something went wrong when it was taken, perhaps some light got in, or something, that can happen, can't it?

The funny thing is, I can't explain this, but there was something – something really awful about this mark. It sounds crazy and you'll think I'm a proper dope. You know what an imagination I've got. You see, it looked to me like a funny sort of animal – a sort of snake thing, with hands and a face. And the oddest part of all, it was in just this place that it looked as if it was sitting square on Gordon's shoulders, with its tail coming down his collar, and its arm-things round his throat and its face pressed close to his, as if it loved him and would never let go.

---

**Tanith Lee's** one previous contribution to *Interzone* was the fairy tale "The Girl Who Lost Her Looks" (issue 128). Born in London in 1947, she has been a writer virtually all her life, and now lives on the Sussex coast. Her novels range from the children's fantasy *The Dragon Hoard* (1971) to such recently-published gothic and fantastic works as *Vivia* (Little, Brown, 1995), *Reigning Cats and Dogs* (Headline, 1995) and *Red Unicorn* (Tor, 1997).

# THE THIRD ALTERNATIVE

## profiles & interviews

STORM CONSTANTINE, JOHN FOWLES, JG BALLARD, GEOFF RYMAN  
JOYCE CAROL OATES, MICHAEL MARSHALL SMITH, NICHOLAS ROYLE  
KIM STANLEY ROBINSON, RUSSELL HOBAN, IAN McEWAN and others

## extraordinary new fiction

CHRISTOPHER PRIEST, JAMES LOVEGROVE, JUSTINA ROBSON, PETER CROWTHER,  
DAVID LANGFORD, JEFF VANOERMEER, TAMAR YELLIN, MIKE O'RISCOLL,  
CLIFFORD THURLOW, RHYS HUGHES, CONRAD WILLIAMS, MARTIN SIMPSON,  
MARK MORRIS, JOEL LANE, LAWRENCE DYER, JASON GOULD, many more


plus stunning artwork, slipstream cinema, provocative comment  
and lots of special offers

A4, 60 glossy pages, colour cover

#15 in good shops now for only £3 or direct from us (add 50p p&p)

subscribe to four issues for just £11 inclusive

TTA Press, 5 Martins Lane, Witcham, Ely, Cambs CB6 2LB

 Eastern Arts  
Board Funded



# Emergency Exit

Colin Greenland

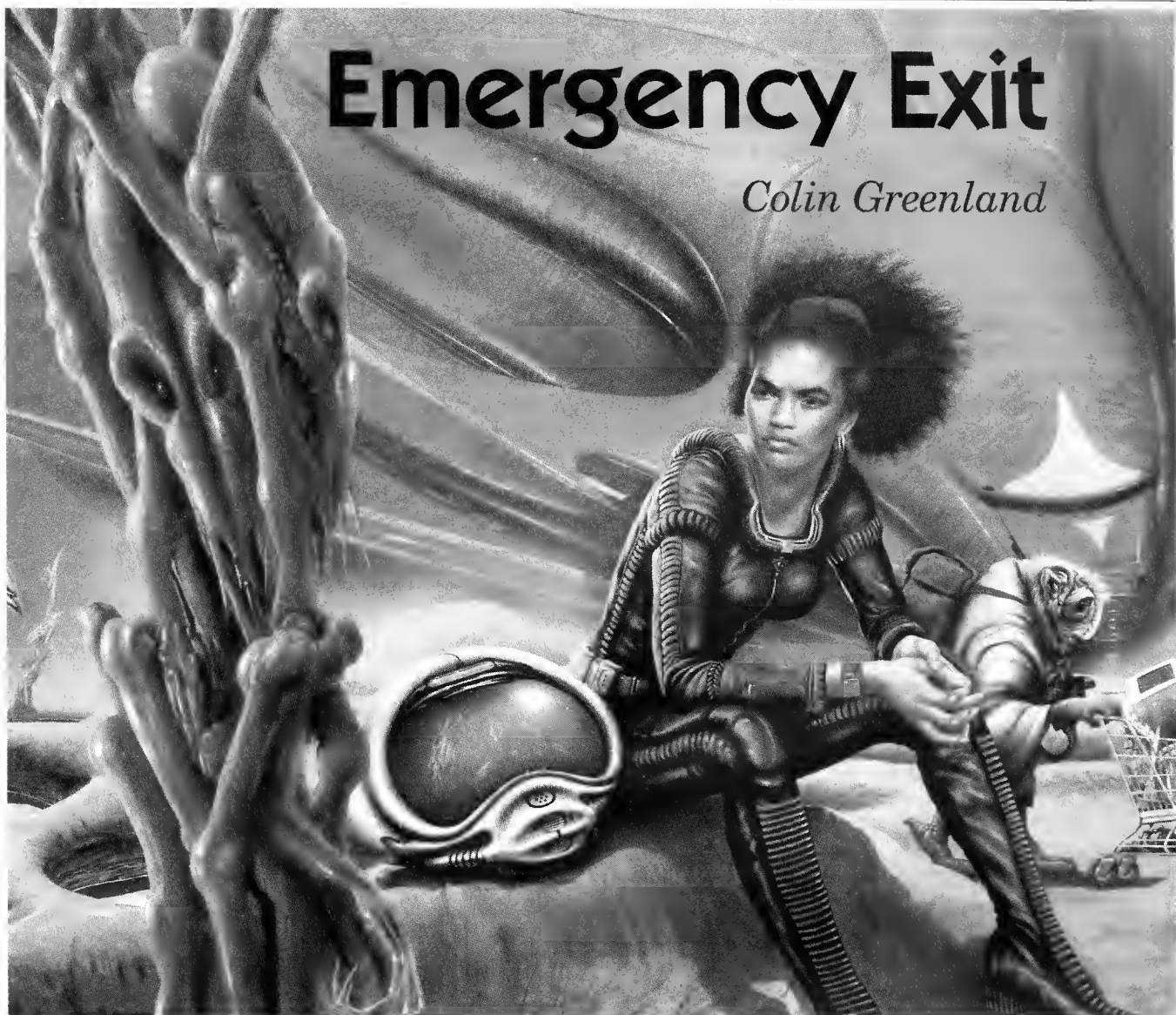


Illustration by Jim Burns

“Blinds up,” said Tabitha Jute.

Above the smooth white expanse of Stardeck, the glass superstructure glittered like palaces of ice. She thought of the temperature out there, and felt her breath catch in her throat.

There was no one about: no patrols, no mechanics. Far out across the grid she could just make out what seemed to be one of the maintenance cars, parked behind a line of ships. Someone must be working out there. She waited a moment in case someone appeared, but no one did. There was no point in waiting. No time would be safer than now. In fact, the longer she waited the more the chances of safety decreased.

Captain Jute took a generous handful of stimulants and washed them down with a glass of pure, clean water. Then she opened the locker and took out the spacesuit.

She checked its life-support systems, its heating circuits, its oxygenator, all of which had been checked already, of course. They read green, green, green.

Go.

Captain Jute transferred some things from the backpack to the pockets of the suit. Then she put the backpack on, and the suit over it.

Through the polarized faceplate of the suit her grand

apartment looked shadowy and sinister. “Sit down and be quiet,” the alien letters on the wall seemed to say. “We’re warning you.”

From the window, she looked down at the little ships. She could see 24 of them. There were scouters and frigates. There was a Nebulon Minion, definitely, and something that looked more like a cement mixer and another one like an egg tray with six long black balloons sticking up out of it.

There was every chance they were a tantalizing holo, the window another of their fancy wallscreens. In actuality there would be nothing out there, nothing at all.

The speed was making her teeth buzz. She took a deep breath. Then she poked her finger through the glass of the small red box and pressed the emergency exit button.

A rush of evacuated air, some expensive furnishings, a cloud of artificial soil, the empty beer tubes and snack containers, crumpled tissues, lost socks and scattered tapes of Captain Tabitha Jute, together with Captain Tabitha Jute herself, followed the window out of the apartment into space.

She tumbled head over heels through the void, free, free! It felt wonderful. You could go spinning away forever, into one of the swollen stars. You could take bets

with yourself on which one it would be. You could try to steer yourself towards whichever one you chose. And then you could change your mind and try for the other one. You'd never know which one it finally was. You hadn't that much air, apart from anything else.

No, you wouldn't really last very long out here. It would only seem like it.

The shiny white Stardeck was receding at a quite remarkable speed, the huge abstract wing slopes of the starship retreating as if to shield it from her. There was something else she had meant to do, back there in her luxury apartment, rather than whirl off into cinerary extinction. She located the jet controls, on the inside of each wrist. There.

She stopped spinning. The ship began to grow larger again. The deck swung upright. The smaller ships that clung to it twinkled like dainty gifts wrapped in metallic foil and hung on a white-tiled wall. In the Captain's ears, beneath the sound of her own breathing, there was the sound of alarms. Someone was hailing her. The volume control was under her chin. She turned it down.

The gridded deck slid into position underneath her. She sailed to meet it, bringing her knees up in the last seconds to land in a less than graceful wallowing crouch. She was out of practice at her free EVA.

They had put some lights on, flooding the parking apron. Her visor darkened, compensating, as she got to her feet. She stood at the centre of four foreshortened shadows stretching out in different directions.

In the glass towers of Stardeck, more lights were coming on. Figures were appearing, silhouettes at the windows. For a moment, Tabitha was confused, a stranger in a strange parking lot, without a clue which way to go. Ships towered over her. They didn't seem to be any of the ones she'd spotted from her window. Twenty metres away was a Minimum Meson, and beyond that a cylindrical blue and brown job covered with wires: bound to be a Vespan something or other. Over to the left was an old Freimacher Courtier that looked as if it had seen some service in its time. To the right, there was nothing for 300 metres. The thing parked there was milky pink and globular, whatever it was. Unpromising.

Behind her Captain Jute saw a wedge-shaped tourer, and behind it the edge of something modular and hexagonal, black with scarlet trim. She grinned at it. It was the egg-tray. It was. Setting her boots for fractional traction, she started to run towards it.

Ten metres away, a bolt of light, violet and electric blue, discharged itself across the white enamel.

Troopers. Some way behind, and not making much effort yet. But they were on the case.

The Captain cursed. Calves and ankles aching, she swerved left, behind the tourer. She could hear the pursuit on the com, the faint hoarse yelping noises of stimulated Eladeldi. Would they hold their fire among the ships?

She ducked under the starboard wing of the tourer, planted one foot on the housing of the undercarriage and levered herself up. Cautiously she peeped over the fuselage.

Blue fire zipped viciously along the fore edge of the wing, frazzling the paintwork.

Panting, Tabitha dropped to the deck and wallowed on, keeping low. The speed took her terror and turned

it into exhilaration. Could she take a wrong turn and lose them on the far side of the field? Let's not prolong the agony, she thought, feeling very cool now, and in control. She slipped out of one aisle into the next.

Seconds later a hoverjeep of red-garbed Eladeldi skimmed silently past the end of that aisle and took the corner at speed, heading up the aisle she had just come from.

Their quarry thrust herself deep into the black shadow between two ships parked close together. Their ion radiator cowlings were off, and fat junction cables hung between them like mating snakes. Stuck to the deck between the ships was a scratched blue toolbox.

This was a bonus prize, better than she could have hoped. Stealthily, her heart thumping, her lungs burning with exertion, the Captain stole towards the toolbox.

Through an open hatch, light spilled from the ship on the left. Captain Jute laid her hand on the edge of the hatchway. She was sure she could feel the vibration of booted feet walking around inside. The mechanic, she presumed, the owner of the tools.

Before she stole them, she would check the next aisle. As lightly and quietly as she could, she crept along the ship and took a quick look out.

In plain view across 50 metres of empty white enamel, a lone trooper stood, feet apart, aiming a gigantic weapon at her.

In a volcanic blast of adrenalin, Tabitha banged her boots against the hull of the ship, cut the magnets and hit the jets with full emergency thrust.

Spinning, in an uncontrolled somersault, she flew up and back, hurtling clear over the two linked ships. Five hundred metres away now, her startled pursuer saw her disappear behind a squat saucer-shaped vessel on spindly telescopic legs. She landed on her bottom, grabbing hold of a strut to steady herself while she switched her boots back.

It had to be along here somewhere. Could she get to it before they could get to her?

Then she saw it. The corner of a chunky profile. A triple "roundmouth" jet assembly like three giant witches' cauldrons tipped up on their sides. A glimmer of deep red starlight on fanciful copper inlay.

*Fuck it*, she whispered exultantly, and abandoning her cover, ran straight out into the open, straight across the dim white deck to the waiting Kobold.

Captain Jute threw herself at the forward port airlock. On the step she crouched, and grasped the door controls. It was locked, naturally. Nobody was working on this one.

She bared her teeth and slapped the Lapham key against the lock. She hit the tab. The tiny lights began to tremble as the virtual tumblers spun.

Sweet as a voluptuary's kiss, the door *clunked* open, admitting the void to the airlock of the barge, and with it Captain Tabitha Jute, interplanetary outlaw, pirate and fugitive.

She snatched the key as the outer door closed. From here in it was automatic, and not fancy. A single unprotected button opened the inner door. Captain Jute leapt easily up the cockpit steps and hit the emergency switches.

She scanned the boards.



There was every hope.

The persona plaque was even in its slot.

Tabitha hesitated, barely. Then she pulled it out, pulled her own smuggled plaque from the pocket of her suit and pushed it in instead.

A gunshot showered the Kobold with magnesium light. The lone hunter had caught up with her again. She put the searchlights on to dazzle him. Before his visor darkened she could see him from the viewport, barking into his microphone.

All around her in the cabin tiny lights were coming on, white and green and gold as Christmas. The air was on. The plaque reader light was on. The vox was off.

Tabitha switched it on. She pulled off her helmet. The soft hiss of rapidly energizing systems filled the cockpit. Green lines of letters were beginning to flicker up onto the console screens.

"HELLO, CAPTAIN," said a voice.

"Hello, Alice," said Tabitha, smugly.

A warning blast exploded across the bows.

"GOOD HEAVENS," said the voice. "SOMEBODY SEEMS TO BE SHOOTING AT US."

Tabitha pulled herself into the web, wrapping it around herself with one hand. The cockpit felt at once familiar and strange, like a place revisited in a dream. Perhaps that was because there was no garbage. Captain Jute began the process of customization by chucking the original persona plaque under the console, where it floated about aimlessly, bumping against her knees.

"We're going now," she said.

"THERE IS ANOTHER PROBLEM, AS WELL," the voice went on, in a calm but faintly puzzled tone. "I RATHER THINK WE ARE IN THE WRONG SHIP. PRELIMINARY SYSTEMS IDENTIFICATION INQUIRIES INDICATE THIS ISN'T BERGEN KOBOLD BGK009059. IT APPEARS TO BE BGK009914. ARE YOU AWARE OF THAT?"

At the end of the aisle the Captain spotted the hoverjeep again, skidding as it took the corner too fast.

"It's fine," she said. "Let's go, can we?"

"AS LONG AS YOU'RE HAPPY," said Alice.

Tabitha primed the impulse jets. She was shaking. The jeep was closing. There was a little green word flashing on the computer console. *HANDSHAKING*, it read. Then it changed to: *READY*.

Eladeldi gunfire smacked the sides of the Kobold, lighting up the deck. The barge gave a shudder.

"*Attedshud, Cabtid Jute!*" roared a hoarse martial voice. "*Surredder the shib ad cub out wid your hads ub!*"

The screens around her filled with little flickering numbers. The cockpit lights all went out and came on again red as blood. The soft hissing noise had changed to a high whining one. Gangling hairy blue aliens in scarlet spacesuits were bouncing out of the jeep, aiming five different kinds of artillery at them.

"Engage," said Captain Jute.

The anchors repolarized. The Bergen Kobold's 16 standard directionals hit the glassy white enamel simultaneously. Troopers went tumbling away in the sudden soundless thunder.

Through the gathering static Kybernator Perlmutter began to bellow. "*Come back here, you dreary little nuisance! You haven't the least idea how much is at stake! You've got nowhere to go! There's absolutely nothing you*

*can do!*"

"Oh, I don't know," said Captain Jute, as she soared wonkily into the eternal night, cannon fire splashing all around her like angry fireworks. "Let's see, shall we?"

So she had come alone after all. Or rather, with the only companion she really needed.

"Let's see, Alice, shall we?"

Alice, who was rather busy, made no reply.

Captain Jute found herself wondering how Alice felt about her now. She knew it was stupid. Alice had very little internal memory and no capacity for moral judgments. All that Alice consisted of was an enormous and highly complicated set of instructions etched on the insides of the molecules of a piece of delta-grain polysilicate. She could run any ship she was configured for, and, in a cybernetic fashion, keep track of her pilot, that element of the ship's control system that made the decisions. She could offer information, consolation and guidance, in response to the stated or detected needs of that element. She could vary the tenor and to some extent the content of her observations by a sequence of sophisticated feedback structures predisposed to collapse in accordance with conventional four-dimensional wave harmonics in 95.5 per cent of cases. She had no actual feelings. When she was not plugged in to a reader, she didn't actually exist.

All the same, a distinct unease tempered the jubilation of Captain Jute. She had treated everybody badly, Alice not least. She wouldn't have blamed the persona for deciding that as the decisive element of the Kobold's control system she was distinctly defective and potentially hazardous, and should be isolated until a replacement arrived.

Captain Jute slapped her gloves on the console. "This is what I needed," she said, while the two ships, the tiny insignificant barge and the mighty interstellar swan, parted company forever. "This is all I really needed all along."

Still there was no reply.

Already the *Citadel of Porcelain at First Light* was no more than an elegant miniature sculpture in polished materials, silver, grey and white. The city on her back glinted like an array of gemstones in the murky starlight.

Somewhere down there, no doubt, grim-faced pilots were being called to their machines, to race out and drag Captain Jute back, or blow her at last into little pieces.

They wouldn't do that, though, would they? The proof of it was, she was still alive. They could have blown her away just now, literally, if they'd really meant to. Obviously what the Guardians enjoyed was having her in a pretty box to look at: their most deadly enemy, the woman who had thwarted them in Sol System. Or maybe there was some King Capellan they were taking her to, whose supreme privilege and satisfaction it would be to gobble her brain himself, in person.

Reality. Concentrate.

"Can we have, um, a status report, do you think, please, Alice?" Her eyes roved across the controls. It would all come back to her in a minute.

"YOU SHOULDN'T REALLY CALL ME ALICE NOW, YOU

KNOW,” said the ship.

“Why?” said Tabitha. “What should I call you?”

“BILLY. BILLY BUDD.”

“You’ve got to be joking. Who does it belong to, anyway?”

The Bergen Kobold *Billy Budd* was registered in the name of an asteroid company. It had left Juno 16 years ago, bound for a rendezvous with the starship, bearing a cargo of miscellaneous precious and semi-precious metals. That was the last entry in the log. The pilot had presumably been devoured, or disposed of, by the Capellans, or simply taken along on the journey, untrammelled, in that unnerving way of theirs.

The status report scrolled by. Captain Jute laughed and sang.

“NINETY PER CENT PLUS. BETTER THAN THE LAST RECORDED EFFICIENCY OF THE ALICE LIDDELL,” said the persona.

She *would* have to remember that. “The *Alice* did all right,” said her erstwhile captain.

“IT IS A STURDY AND RELIABLE MODEL, THE KOBOLD,” observed the persona blandly.

Tabitha Jute rubbed her hand through her hair. Her head was still a whirl of chemicals, natural and synthetic. She checked the scanners again. No pursuit yet. Distance, that was the main thing. “Full speed ahead, Billy,” she said. “I can’t bloody call you Billy. You’re Alice now, all right?”

Pinpricks of light flickered around the boards. “COMPLETE REATtribution WILL TAKE MUCH-NEEDED COMPUTER TIME,” murmured the calm, warm voice.

“Do it later! Meanwhile, accept instructions addressed to Alice. By me.”

“RIGHT YOU ARE, CAPTAIN. WHERE ARE WE GOING?”

“What are our options?”

There was the briefest of pauses before the voice replied. “SHALL WE HAVE SOME PARAMETERS? YOU CHOOSE.”

“You’re being sarcastic. You were never sarcastic.”

“YOU WERE NEVER LISTENING.”

“Bollocks.” She checked the charts. “Of course I was listening. I used to do nothing but listen to you. You can’t find Dodger, can you?” she asked. “She’s not transmitting somewhere?” She would still be on Plenty, whatever her girlfriend said. Plenty of places to hide on Plenty. “Can you check that planet?”

“THREE OF THREE,” said the persona. “0.67D, 0.50G, ATMOSPHERE COVERAGE 17.1 PER CENT, PRINCIPAL COMPONENTS OXYGEN NITROGEN HELIUM. ISOLATED FREE WATER, 0.2 PER CENT VEGETATION, RADIATION RISK HIGH.” There was a short pause. White and yellow circles drew themselves on the com screens, coloured themselves in.

“NO DETECTABLE TRANSMISSIONS.”

“You wouldn’t happen to know if it’s crawling with Capellans?”

“INSUFFICIENT DATA,” said Alice.

“Sounds as if it might be the wreck they left behind. What about asteroids?”

“LISTING 97 NEAREST,” said Alice. She arranged them by proximity, then by size, then by composition. Charred and disintegrating lumps of rock, none of them especially desirable. Tabitha had her add known and presumable ships, artificial orbitals and other miscellaneous flotsam. There were too many choices, too few

of them any good.

Captain Jute made a fist. “Okay. Like this. Put out a message for Saskia and the Cherub.”

“WHERE ARE THEY, CAPTAIN?”

“On one of those ships, probably. Use every frequency you can. Prioritize possible matches with any Seraph registration.”

“THE DATA IN THIS VESSEL IS SIXTEEN –”

“Years out of date, I know. I don’t know, I’m trying, you try too.”

“AND THE CONTENT OF THE MESSAGE?”

“Just say I’m still alive, temporarily, and well, more or less, and have checked out for— No, don’t tell them where we’re going.” Her thoughts were intricate, unstable, dancing on the edge of destruction. “We don’t want everyone else to know.”

“TRANSMITTING, CAPTAIN,” replied the persona.

Tabitha rubbed her finger across the aft scanner screen. Everything was covered with a thin film of sooty stardust. “What are these little blue dots coming up behind us?”

“FIVE FREIMACHER TINKERBELLS,” said Alice.

“Shit.”

The Eladeldi pilots grinned in their muzzle masks, teeth working. They chewed the paste that soaked up their flooding saliva.

“*Idtercep’ ad retreeb!*” yapped the dispatcher on the com. Automatic reminders of pursuit procedure, disablement and capture routines, glowed on their screens and whispered in their earpieces. The reminders were superfluous. On a mission like this, you could forget training. Training didn’t come into it. When something ran away, you chased. When something belonging to the Masters ran away, you chased very hard, as hard as you could.

Flight Leader addressed the patrol in their own language. “*Fifth claw formation, Three on point,*” he huffed in their earpieces. “*Prey fore right-right altitude 15.5. Full hunt speed.*”

The phalanx of five tore into the night.

The stolen ship, an aging Terran barge, was a tiny lead-coloured dot whizzing away Onwards. By the target meters, it was going flat out.

Blue paws nudged the modified controls of the five Tinkerbells. They were the fastest pursuit ships in the galaxy. Humans had built them. Humans built the best ships. A Freimacher Tinkerbell could overtake any old barge with ease. These Freimacher Tinkerbells had the best pursuit pilots at the controls. Eladeldi made the best, most single-minded officers.

Humans did not make the worst offenders. Perks, with their omnidirectional sense of hostility, made the worst offenders. Humans made the second worst. It was a human who had stolen the barge the pilots were chasing, a human female, Luna-born, born trouble. The dossier on the human was flashing under Mission Background. It showed her as a lifelong offender against the Masters and the Law. The Masters had been nothing but kind to her, as they were to all their charges. Kind Masters. The human was bad, all bad. She revelled in violations of the regulations. She was a thief and a murderer. Her hands were stained with Masters’ blood.

The phalanx cut the distance between them and the

human in half.

"Take notice, Pursuit Flight," said the voice of the Kybernator. "She's an unpredictable little creature, this one. Let's sort it out, now, Flight Leader, shall we?"

"Brey veering 19 degrees Doowards!" announced the dispatcher, before Flight Leader could reply.

In formation, the ships of the pursuit flight turned as if they had been welded together. You could almost hear the pilots yelping.

Ahead, in the distance, black grit accumulated around the smouldering twin suns. Bulletins were out to all vessels. The fugitive would be apprehended. She had nowhere to hide, nowhere to go to ground. In the Tinkerbelle cockpits the stink of ancient hunting signals would have made your fur stand on end.

"Hhuban hhedig for Bledty hhive," Flight Leader rasped, reporting back. It was a move just as desperate as it was obvious. The battered Frisque vessel floated mere minutes away. The human thought of it as home. An evacuation shuttle was approaching it, a golden scavenger insect docking with a nutritious corpse.

"One and Five flank," he ordered them. "Warning fire on my signal."

The outer ships peeled away, sliding forward to contain the prey. The stolen barge flew heedless as a flung stone. The hunters snorted with gusto and chewed their paste. She was unarmed. She was defenceless as a mud turtle. They could practically taste her. Their muzzles ached to get inside her shell.

"Two, Four," said Flight Leader, who was himself flying Tinkerbelle Two. "Warning fire."

Violet light speared through the vacuum. The beams met metres ahead of the Kobold's nose.

"One, Five," said Flight Leader, almost before the glare decayed. "Warning fire."

The guns of the flanking attackers swivelled and pinned the hurtling barge neatly in a slim slice of space. Her stubby port wing swayed into the path of Five's ray and lost a large chunk of itself in a cloud of atomizing debris. Across the team com, the others heard Five snarl joyfully, claiming first blood.

The phalanx drew up to bracket the quarry as if she were standing still. They started to buzz her, pushing at her nerve, nudging her to turn around. Flight Leader was requesting her com frequency from the dispatcher. They all locked on the stolen Kobold, growling at her while the chief's line cycled the recital of her violations.

The Frisque starship loomed larger and larger, big and brown and shapeless. Did she think someone there could rescue her? She would not even reach it.

The phalanx closed. They were the best pursuit pilots in the galaxy. They snapped at her heels, her wings, her antennae.

"Attedshud, Cabtid Jute!" yapped Flight Leader. "Surredder the hfessel or be deftroyed!"

The stolen Kobold shimmered in an envelope of blue light.

Then it disappeared.

It wasn't there any more.

Tinkerbelle One braked frantically; too late. He collided with Five, slid helplessly belly to belly with him for a way, then broke up. His capsule ejected safely. Five was not so lucky. Flying fragments pierced his canopy, his suit, his body and his brain, all in less time than it

takes to tell.

"Abort, abort!" screamed Flight Leader and the dispatcher together.

Fighting for control in the collapsed formation, the three remaining pilots hauled their ships into clear space. Chattering and moaning, bristling and shivering, they flew a rapid orbit of the hive in sheer fury before zooming off to pick up their surviving comrade's escape capsule.

"Hwere is hshe?" raged Flight Leader to the dispatcher, but all she could do was lower ears and put her head on one side. Nobody could find where the Kobold had gone.

Tabitha unfastened the web, stretched and yawned.

"Nice going, Alice."

"THANK YOU, CAPTAIN."

She looked out of the viewport into the lacuna that lay between the dimensions. It was dim, mottled, greyish-white on whitish-grey. She felt like a microscopic particle crawling the long way through an infinite sheet of fibreboard.

The sudden absence of everything in the universe made her very very tired. The last vestiges of the speed had drained away. Now stress was the only thing holding her together.

"I've got to get out of this suit."

"INTERNAL INTEGRITY AND LIFE SUPPORT FUNCTIONS SATISFACTORY AT 97.8 PER CENT," said the ship serenely.

Tabitha started plucking at her seals. "Is there anything you need, Alice?"

"A NEW PORT WING WOULD BE THE HIGHEST PRIORITY."

"You're kidding."

"I CAN'T KID."

Captain Jute slid back into her seat. "Damage report?" she said wearily.

It was already on the screen. She sucked her teeth. "The bastards."

"AS YOU SAY, CAPTAIN."

"Have we got spares? Have we got drones?"

"UNFORTUNATELY NOT," the persona said. "NEITHER."

"They could have cut it out of something, if we'd got drones. Shit. Shit."

"WELL, WE DON'T NEED IT FOR THE MOMENT," said the ship confidently.

"I knew I should have had that fucking toolbox. What have we got, do you know?"

"YOU CAN HAVE A PROPER LOOK LATER, CAPTAIN," said the ship, kindly if sternly. "YOUR OWN REPAIRS MUST COME FIRST."

Tabitha went through the hold. It was empty. After there was the ablute, the galley and two minute cabins, just like on the *Alice Liddell*. She pulled off her clothes and squeezed into the ablute.

The hard bit would be putting down, she thought, as the ultrasound raked her numb body. If they ever got the chance.

Don't think about it, she told herself.

Putting her hands up over her head, she bumped her elbow on the housing. She had forgotten how grotty it was, having to shower on board. In her apartment on the Capellan ship she had had silky purified water, 20 dif-





**Paul Brazier:** *Take Back Plenty* started as a single novel, didn't it?

**Colin Greenland:** It did, unless you count the two short stories I wrote first about her, about Tabitha Jute. I tried to keep it to that. What can I say? I'm lazy. I'm always full of doubts. A whole novel, a whole big fat space opera novel: that sounded like hard work.

**Brazier:** Now it has grown into the Tabitha Jute trilogy, will you be getting back to doing one-off novels again?

**Greenland:** At any time there's only ever really one book I can write: the next one. The only time I've ever seen further ahead than that was when I knew there was going to be more about Tabitha, and that meant two more books. In the first book she'd got the ship, so the second would be the journey, and the third, what happens when they get there. Beginning, middle, and end. Simple as that.

Incidentally, it wasn't my publisher who asked me to do that. It was my readers. They assumed there was more, and eventually I realized they were right. Which is why *Seasons of Plenty* is dedicated to the ones who took the time to point it out to me.

**Brazier:** I suppose the danger of writing more than one book with the same central character is that people might get bored with that one person.

**Greenland:** In fact, the story of Tabitha is so much the story of other people, her friends and enemies and associates, all the people who are getting on with their own lives with or without reference to her, that in the middle of *Mother of Plenty* my American editor wrote to me, saying "Please don't stray too far from your heroine." I think she was afraid people might forget who they were reading about. Well, perhaps they do, some of them. People read things in all manner of states of confusion. If you're reading *Seasons of Plenty* and you're not the slightest bit confused, then I've probably failed. If you're not enjoying being confused, then you're probably reading the wrong kind of book. You probably shouldn't be reading sf at all, or at least you should read it very selectively. Stay away from Philip K. Dick. Stay away from Greg Egan.

**David Pringle:** You're in your 40s now, so you've seen the world change. I was chatting with an old school friend, someone I hadn't seen in many years, and we found ourselves agreeing that our lives fell into two clear halves. There was the Utopian period, which in British terms stretched from the time shortly before we were born, the postwar Labour government, the creation of the welfare state, through the rising expectations of the nascent consumer society, the era of "Butskellism," of consensus about a mixed economy



# *in* SPACE?

*Colin Greenland*

*interviewed by*

*Paul Brazier &*

*David Pringle*

and so on, of the so-called Youth Revolution, a time when the majority of ordinary people seemed to be *happy* because they could look forward to better things – that era which came to an end, roughly speaking, in the mid-1970s. Then the second half of our lives to date has been passed in this Dystopian period, a time of *falling* expectations, of Thatcherism-and-Majorism, of growing inequalities and political polarization, of unemployment and dead-end sink estates, of Yuppies and Fat Cats, of dashed hopes and pessimism about the future in general... (By the way, I base these remarks not only on my own memories and my friend's, but on observations of my son's experiences and those of his friends – they don't seem to be very happy people.) By this reckoning, if things go in 25- or 30-year cycles, we should be in for a real upturn again around the year 2000! How do you feel about all that, as someone who has lived through most of it in much the same way?

**Greenland:** I certainly agree with you about the swing from optimism to pessimism. I don't know if it's justified. I mean, was the optimism justified in the first place? There were certainly no grounds for the optimism of the Youth Revolution. Just because social structures are oppressive, it doesn't follow that abandoning them will bring peace, love and enlightenment.

Thatcher was a nightmare, but maybe anything would have been. Hard to imagine anything could have been worse. But maybe – and here I don't know what I'm talking about, because I have no historical or political education – maybe the assumptions behind the Welfare State, glorious ideal though it is, and I speak as someone who wouldn't be here today if it weren't for the National Health Service – maybe those assumptions came straight out of the assumptions behind the Commonwealth, which came straight out of the Empire. Maybe they were all false assumptions about our relations with each other and the planet. Maybe none of it was ever tenable.

It's interesting, putting that together with the space opera revival. Iain Banks's response to *Scarcity Thinking* was to imagine the Culture, a civilization with infinite resources. Mine was to dream of *Plenty*, though there was already irony in that name. "Everything is here", their slogan said. Everything, especially madness, violence and death. Maybe we're all always much worse off than we like to think.

**Pringle:** You are a critic as well as a fiction-writer. Your first book, *The Entropy Exhibition* (1983) was about the "New Wave" sf of *New Worlds* magazine, and in particular about the work of Brian Aldiss, J. G. Bal-

...all our  
characters, all  
the good guys,  
are female.

lard and Michael Moorcock. How do you feel about it after more than 15 years?

**Greenland:** I look at it and think, "Yes, but..." I was very ignorant then, especially about sf. Some bits are surprisingly good, though – the sort of thing you read 15 years later and think, "How on earth did I manage that?"

**Brazier:** Your writing is very different from that of Ballard, Moorcock and Aldiss, and yet some of their preoccupations do surface in your fiction at times. Do you feel you have been influenced by them?

**Greenland:** Absolutely. It's no coincidence that my most popular book, *Take Back Plenty*, came straight after *Death is No Obstacle*, that book of interviews I did with Mike Moorcock about the way he writes. You learn a lot, following Mike around with a tape recorder. Apart from the craft, which is what we were talking about, his principles, his philosophy, have been absolutely decisive in forming my idea of what we're all trying to do with this stuff and why.

The other evening at Waterstone's, there was Pat Cadigan, Tom Holt, Steve Baxter, Paul McAuley and me, and someone asked us why we write sf and fantasy. And there was Mike Moorcock sitting in the audience – at

the back, smiling sagely. That was interesting. I said the thing I always say, that sf is the only kind of writing I know that describes the weirdness and multiplicity of the modern world. And Mike said then that when he and Brian and Jimmy were starting what turned into the "New Wave", all they were really doing was trying to devise a fiction capable of describing their own experience.

I have a powerful sense of the enormous freedom of sf. I'm sure I owe that to Brian Aldiss. And the obligation to make it new and different, to set high standards for your work. To be ready to be put on the shelf next to anyone. And Ballard – believe it or not, the book of mine that owes most to J. G. Ballard is *Harm's Way*. Sophie Farthing, and the way she tells her story. The narrator whose imagination is a little bit strange, telling you about a world that's even stranger.

**Pringle:** What do you think about the later development of those three, Aldiss, Ballard and Moorcock? Have they lived up to expectations?

**Greenland:** Hm. I think it might be presumptuous of anyone to have expectations of Brian Aldiss, or of Michael Moorcock, come to that! Whatever it is, they've done it, several times over, usually. It's the world that lets them down, lets us all down. Somewhere there is a parallel world where J. G. Ballard is recognized as the most important English writer of our time. It's not that far away, either. They can see it quite clearly from France, for example.

**Pringle:** Ballard once said that fulfilling one's life's ambitions was a bit like reaching the clouds – all those lovely fluffy white castles in the sky: you get there, but you don't realize you've "made it" because there's just a kind of disappointing grey mist all around you. How do you feel about this now that you have half a dozen novels under your belt?

**Greenland:** I'll trade you a Brian Eno for your J. G. Ballard: "This often happens: you imagine a territory rich in possibilities and try to think of how you might get to it, and then suddenly one day you look around and realize that you have been there for quite a long time."

I prefer that, I think. I don't yet share Ballard's sense of disappointment! The territory I'm working now has always been in reach, as far as I can see, at least up until *Mother of Plenty*. There's just so much of it. The infinity of science fiction. But as a writer I've only ever really had one ambition: to reach everybody who would enjoy what I do. I'm as far from that as I ever was.

**Brazier:** Looking at the credits in *The Plenty Principle*, there are a lot



of shared-world stories, and, indeed, you contributed a story to *IZ 127*, our themed Xmas issue. Do you rely on commissions to generate story ideas?

**Greenland:** Well, it's nice to be wanted. What a commission does is give me a context, a reason to write a story. I have a large file on my computer, called NOTIONS, which is full of scraps. When I know someone's asking for stories, I look in there.

**Pringle:** What do you find?

**Greenland:** Bits of dreams. Overheard things. Two women talking. One said: "I have to admit, some of my best friends are men." And the other one said: "Mine too, but I wouldn't let my daughter marry one."

**Brazier:** Nearly all your lead characters are women. If my memory serves me correctly, the only book with a male central character is *Daybreak on a Different Mountain*.

**Greenland:** Two of them. Dubilier and Lupio. The idealist and the rationalist, both looking for a vanished god. *The Hour of the Thin Ox* was a sort of transitional book, about a woman and a boy. Or a woman and an old man, depending how much of it you've read. One of the problems with that book is the way the male lead switches halfway through. I learned a lot from that, from the problem that gave the readers. But yes, you could definitely say Jillian Curram was the central character of that book, the one I cared most about. And after that there was *Other Voices*, a book about a woman and a girl. By the time of *Seasons of Plenty*, when I was planning that out, I discovered that virtually all our characters, all the good guys, are female. That was odd. That started to feel a bit off-key.

**Brazier:** Could it be that the fantastic genres you write in are better

suited to your exploration of feminist themes? I have spent most of my life being far more in sympathy with women than men, and indeed feel I have far more in common with women. Do you identify with women in this way, and is this the reason for the gender of your lead characters?

**Greenland:** I suppose so, on some level. I do find men in general very hard to identify with.

**Brazier:** There is a school of thought that says that all fictional characters are solely aspects of their creators' minds. Are your lead characters actually you in a frock?

**Greenland:** No, not a bit. Tabitha Jute and I have nothing in common. We wouldn't even be able to have a conversation. I'd like to, of course I would, she fascinates me. But she'd think I'm a bit of a creep. She'd probably be right.

This sort of area is hard to explain to anyone who doesn't write fiction, but you can draw on your own experiences, especially your own emotions – you use all that to get in touch with your characters and what they go through; but that's a completely different thing from writing about yourself. My characters are like my friends, they're people I think I know pretty well, like you and David. I don't think it's a big deal to claim I can understand them and sympathize with them. That's just basic human intercourse. They can still surprise me, of course they can. Saskia Zodiac surprised and delighted me when I found out what she was going to do at the end of *Mother of Plenty*.

**Pringle:** Do you ever get really angry about things? And if so, how does that inform your writing?

**Greenland:** That's interesting. Anger terrifies me. When I was little, strong emotions brought on my

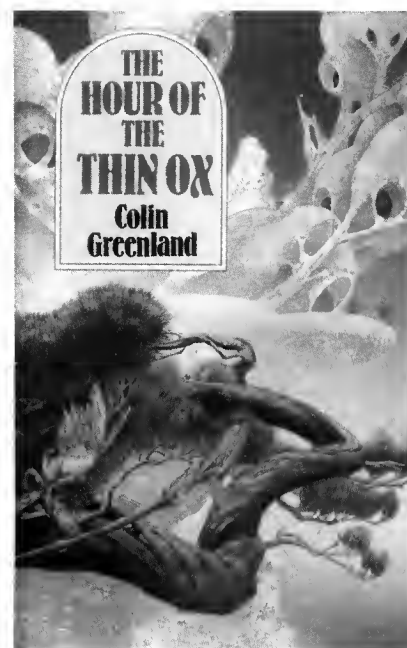
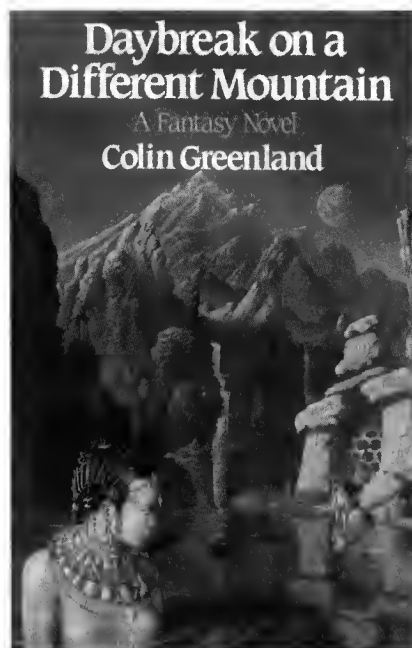
asthma. So, placidity was the rule. My mum and dad put a high priority on stopping me from getting angry or excited. "Getting yourself all worked up," they would call it.

So now, when I get angry, I get miserable. Big, horrible, gnawing depression. All frigid and disconnected. There's a lot of that in Part Three of *Seasons of Plenty*, the one called "Cold Light Fades." I went down a lot further into the dark with that than I'd expected. I was desperately unhappy when I was writing that, and a lot of that misery was anger. Anger at a woman who was treating me badly, anger at myself because I was handling it badly, being helpless and making it worse. All that poured out into the book. The collapse of Tabitha, Grant Nothing torturing Saskia, people killing each other, the ship wandering off into the unknown. Unknown except to German readers, that is.

Foreign publishers change my titles, which is fair enough. Some of them are very good at it. *Take Back Plenty* in Danish is *Den Ny Alice, The New Alice*. Very clever, when you think about Alice and what happens to her. Well, when my German publisher was looking for a suitable German title for *Seasons*, they went straight to the last line. That's the punchline, the shock revelation of the book. That they made the title. Those wacky, fun-loving Germans. They get you every time.

**Pringle:** You mentioned Greg Egan. Are there any newer sf writers, who have emerged since the time you wrote *The Entropy Exhibition*, who have impressed you particularly?

**Greenland:** Impressed me? Overwhelmed me. Dozens of them. Gwyneth Jones, Bill Gibson, Geoff Ryman, Michael Swanwick, Paul McAuley... That man Pratchett's quite amusing, too, but then I did say



he was promising – p.204, if I remember aright.

**Pringle:** In his book *Ultimate Island: On the Nature of British Science Fiction* (1993) the critic Nicholas Ruddick (who referred to your book, by the way) expressed the view that British sf lasted, roughly, from Wells to Ballard, and that since the end of the 1970s it has “died.” Some new British sf still appears, according to the austere Mr Ruddick, but it’s mostly pastiche space opera and nostalgic *hommage* of one kind or another (the only two post-1979 writers he deigns to mention, and then very briefly, are Iain Banks and Ian McDonald). What do you think of this attitude, which is implicitly a criticism of your own fiction as well as others’?

**Greenland:** People are always announcing the death of things: sf, the novel, the cinema, feminism, rock & roll, proper English. Things have a way of going on, regardless. That rude, popular vitality is the point, as far as I’m concerned. It’s the key. Send not to ask for whom the bell tolls, it’s always a false alarm.

**Pringle:** How do you respond to people who accuse you (assuming, hypothetically, that they ever do!) of being a “mere pasticheur” or a writer of nostalgic, backward-looking sf?

**Greenland:** Well, no one ever has, no. Not in my hearing. I don’t know how I’d respond. Thoughtfully, I suppose. I think it’s always worth trying to get some understanding of why people are dissatisfied, if they are. It isn’t always worth it, of course, but I always think it might be. I suppose I’d say, pastiche is a technique, I’ve used it, yes, but it’s not the only thing I’ve used. I’ve used everything I could get a handle on!

And I don’t look backward, I look around. If the battered spaceships and melancholy aliens of sf turn out to be the best means of describing what I see, then perhaps that tells us all something about sf and the true nature of its prescience.

**Brazier:** Way back when you were writer-in-residence at North East London Poly, you came to the writers’ workshop at my college and gave us an extract from a novel where an alien ticket-inspector on a train is trying to wake up a sleeping human. Considering this was going on 20 years ago, it must have made quite an impression on me. Have you thought of taking that particular novel any further?

**Greenland:** I finished it. It was one of the novels I wrote between *Daybreak* and *Thin Ox*. It was called *Requiem for Verdi*. John Brunner said the title telegraphed a downbeat ending, I remember. I finished it, and it immediately fell in two. It had a Y-

## I throw everything up in the air and write about what comes down.

shaped plot, with two locations and sets of characters who come together for the end. Only they didn’t. They were oil and water, chalk and cheese. Each half made the other look a bit daft. I believe I ransacked one of them when I was writing *Take Back Plenty*, though whether any of the material made it all the way to publication, I couldn’t tell you now. I don’t believe the rest survives anywhere. I’m sure even the SF Foundation hasn’t got a copy of that.

**Pringle:** You are just about old enough to remember a time when “fantasy” as a marketplace category, or commercial genre, scarcely existed: how do you feel about the way it has grown and developed as a separate genre over the past 25 years or so?

**Greenland:** All fiction is fantasy. Sf is a highly specialized, crystalline kind. Oddly, the genre people *call* fantasy has come to be the least fantastic of all. Its principal virtues are familiarity and comfort. It’s woolly cardigan fiction, I suppose. Nice, if the world strikes you as a bit chilly.

**Pringle:** Is J. R. R. Tolkien spinning in his grave?

**Greenland:** Knitting, certainly. The Lord of the Cardigans, he was.

**Pringle:** Why do you think it was that you started out as a fantasy novelist

and then turned pretty decisively to science fiction? Wasn’t this a bit perverse, given that most of the money seems to be in fantasy these days?

**Greenland:** Oh, I never know where the money’s going to go. I write the book I have to write. Marketing is something that has to be sorted out later. Maybe that’s one reason my publishers put so little effort into marketing them these days. If you don’t fit the pre-existing profile, to be printed at all is a blessing, supposedly.

If I were able to consult the market, I should never have written *Take Back Plenty*. The outline for that was rejected by every sf publisher in London: all except Unwin Hyman. Fortunately, by the time I’d written it the wind had turned in our direction. Then there were editors ringing people up, trying to persuade them to write something like it. I don’t know that anyone did, really. Or if they did, probably the editors were off after some other wild goose by then. A pity, really. I’d like to have read some of those.

**Pringle:** So, if not Tolkien, who would you say have been your main influences in fantasy, as opposed to sf?

**Greenland:** Lewis Carroll, Mervyn Peake, M. John Harrison, Angela Carter, Peter Beagle. Richard Adams’s *Shardik* was terribly important when I was writing *Daybreak on a Different Mountain*. I imagine it was that sense of myth as a thing of fur and blood, not an occult abstraction. The divinity gradually accumulating itself out of the everyday, rather than coming down from the sky.

I couldn’t give a toss about divinities these days, of course, and I haven’t read Richard Adams since. But you never know what’s going to feed a particular book. The influences on *The Hour of the Thin Ox* and *Other Voices* were musical, rather than literary. The Cure, the Cocteau Twins, Dead Can Dance, played over and over and over again. Susanna keeps playing Dead Can Dance when she’s writing. The sort of fiction she gets out of them is totally different.

And what about *Harm’s Way*, then? Is that fantasy or is it sf? There you are, you see, there’s your problem. What is that book? It’s a Victorian space romance, that’s what it is. Unfortunately Victorian space romances are quite rare, so the trade has to lump it in with a lot of other books with which it has as many differences as similarities.

**Brazier:** To me the *Plenty* novels and *The Hour of the Thin Ox* are sf, while the others are fantasies with more or less sf trappings. My thinking is that sf works by extrapolation, where fantasy works by induction: sf exists in a fictional real world that is somehow linked to the one we live in. We could get there from here or, if something in the past has changed,

we might be there instead of here now; whereas fantasy exists in a parallel world that we could never inhabit. We apprehend the reality of the fictional world only by comparison with ours. As nothing in the fantasy world can be taken as real, fantasy can only be moral fiction, whereas science fiction, by virtue of its putative link with our reality, can also be used to depict solutions to merely physical problems.

**Greenland:** Yes, that's pretty much the way Kim Stanley Robinson formulated the distinction in his book on Philip K. Dick. I don't extrapolate, of course. I scramble. I throw everything up in the air and write about what comes down.

It's all moral to me, in the sense you mean, Paul, that it's about people and their ways. Not about delivering a moral lesson. At the end of the Tabitha Jute trilogy there's only the same simplistic moral as there was at the end of *Other Voices*. Trust one another. Work together.

**Pringle:** Have you ever taken an interest in foreign-language sf – Stanislaw Lem, the Strugatsky brothers, or whoever? Do you think we could all learn from foreign influences?

**Greenland:** Scarcely; and yes, of course. To my mind, what's good about sf springs straight out of the alleyways of Prague: golems and Rossum's Universal Robots and Gregor Samsa waking up as a beetle. But have I read any? No. I'm a true Brit, which is to say stupidly monoglot.

**Pringle:** Talking of those alleyways of Prague, I've just read in *Locus* today that Ivan Adamovich, the editor of the Czech magazine *Ikarie*, has discovered a "lost" sf novella from 1907. This turns out not only to be (a) by President Vaclav Havel's grandfather, but (b) about a future

president of Czechoslovakia at the end of the 20th century, and (c) about the said politician being an artificial man, i.e. a robot (though not called that) – in a story written 13 years before another Czech writer, Karel Capek, invented the notion of the robot for the modern world! There's an enormous amount of sf out there, in various European languages, about which we know so little. Do you ever feel, perhaps, that British sf should try to get closer to its European roots? Or, to reverse the question, should we be doing more to distance ourselves from the overwhelming American influence (as, indeed, the New Wave writers tried to do 30 years ago)?

**Greenland:** I don't know about distancing ourselves. I'm in favour of an authentic British sf, of British sf writers writing what the hell they want to, but there wouldn't be much authenticity in a British literature that showed no trace of America. Culture doesn't stop at the borders any more.

The Tabitha Jute books are thoroughly British, but they're rich in imported Americana. Movies, especially. *Take Back Plenty* couldn't have been written without *Alien*. In *Mother of Plenty* there's a proper *Star Wars* dogfight, finally. There's a tendency for my villains to be American. Funny, that, considering how Hollywood favours Brits for those parts these days.

The problem is, I suppose, the popular idea that if it's science fiction, it must be predictive, extrapolative; that it must be *about* the future, and literal to the core. You can lay that at the door of John W. Campbell, but I don't see anything there that H. G. Wells wouldn't have signed up to, for example. In fact, of course, that is one kind of sf, and it's a perfectly acceptable one.

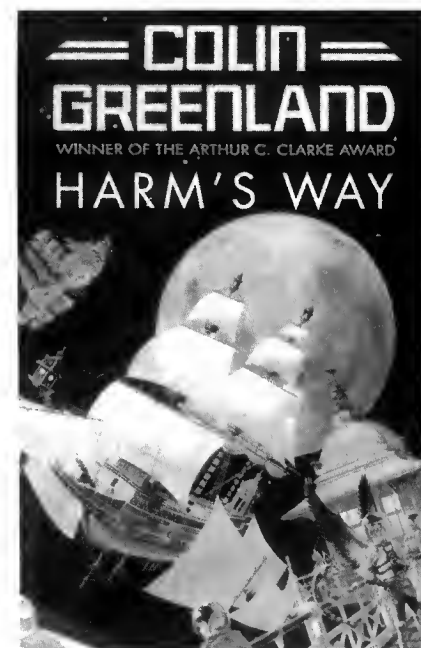
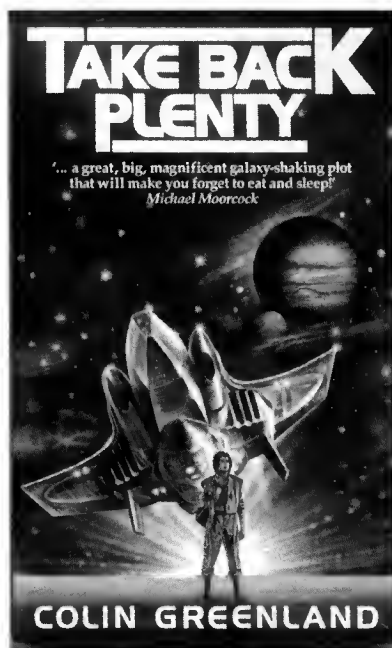
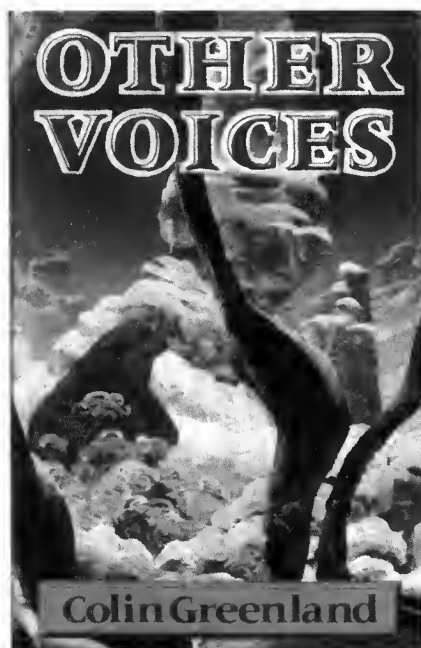
But Continental European fantastic literature doesn't waste time with literalism. Whether it's Lem or Kafka or Rabelais, as far as I can see, it's a critical literature, in opposition to whatever is assumed to be the case. It is about getting at the truth by means of travesty and inversion. It's more about dreams than about logical extrapolation. Am I in favour of cultivating that? You bet I am.

These days, though, that connection is as likely to be made in California as in Cambridge. That phrase "a critical literature" I must have learned from Samuel R. Delany. His later, self-explanatory works seem to me terribly windy and indigestible, but where would I be without *The Einstein Intersection* or *Babel-17*? I've just read Stepan Chapman's *The Troika*, which is a thoroughly American book, and a thoroughly New Wave book too. And it's exactly the sort of sf I was just describing. It messes with your head, *and* it tells you a story. You can't predict it, you can't categorize it, and any literalist who tried to master it would be whimpering on the floor by page five.

**Brazier:** You have had some work broadcast on Radio 4. One of the stories is included in *The Plenty Principle*, but I heard another last year. How did you come to do them?

**Greenland:** I say I've only ever really had one ambition, but there's another. I'd love to read one of my stories on radio. I read *Take Back Plenty* onto tape, the whole thing, as a Talking Book for the Blind. That was huge fun, but so far only their registered users can get hold of it. It would be nice if a commercial audiobook publisher picked that up. It does happen. It happened to Michael Palin, for one.

I wrote those stories, "The Suffer the Children Man" and "A Bit of Company," specially for Radio 4.





They're stories to be read aloud. There are others. "Talking Through the Wind" is one. They turned that one down. We'll try them again with it another day, when they've forgotten about it.

There's another radio piece, a serial called "The Sun Garden of the Infanta," that Radio 4 commissioned and never used. A five-part story, each episode by a different writer. Typical BBC, if you ask me. They've got original work by Mary Gentle and Paul McAuley and Colin Greenland, that nobody's ever heard. They've got one of the last things Bob Shaw ever completed. The first episode was by Iain Banks, for goodness sake. They paid us for it. They made me do so many rewrites, they had to pay me twice. And what have they done with it? Nothing.

**Brazier:** You seem to be making your mark in the world as an English sf writer, and to have achieved some small prosperity...

**Greenland:** "Small" is the word. You know the kind of prosperity that's so small you forget you've got it? That kind.

**Brazier:** Do you see yourself continuing in this vein, or do you have other invisible strings to your bow? Are you branching out into, say, radio, playwriting, multimedia, interactive games – or more exotic occupations, like unusual tea-taster or lollipop man? We know how you have spent the past 20 years; what do you envisage for the next 20?

**Greenland:** For the next 20 years, I envisage a slow decline into baldness, corpulence and incoherence. I am destined for a niche somewhere between Bilbo Baggins and Homer Simpson. Four square meals a day, and all the doughnuts you can eat.

For the next year or so, there's a novel just begun, an idea that the

## Four square meals a day, and all the doughnuts you can eat.

nice script editor at BBC TV Drama Series likes and I'm neglecting shamefully, and *Tempesta*, which has just come back online after years of Dave McKean neglecting that rather less shamefully. Dave and DC Comics are negotiating that one. Dave wants it to be a 400-page novel, on decent paper, God, vellum, hand-printed with woodblocks and Indian ink, knowing Dave. What DC want is a

series of little monthly comics printed on pulp with garish colours and extra acid, I don't know. They'll sort it out.

The tv idea is, again, something dreamed up specially for them, for tv. I think I could do that, contribute to that enormous complicated hydra-headed nightmare that is the TV production. I'm not sure I could dramatize one of my own books, let alone direct it myself, the way Steve Gallagher did. I remember running into Terry Pratchett just after he'd returned from Hollywood, from the *Mort* debacle. Ashen-faced Terry Pratchett. "You know they're going to barbecue your baby," he said, "but you don't have to help them turn the spit."

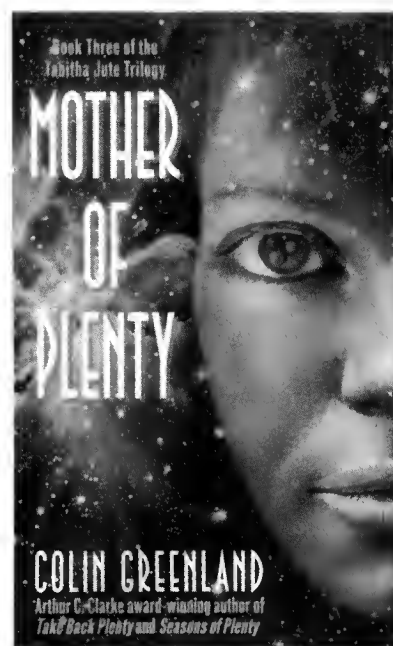
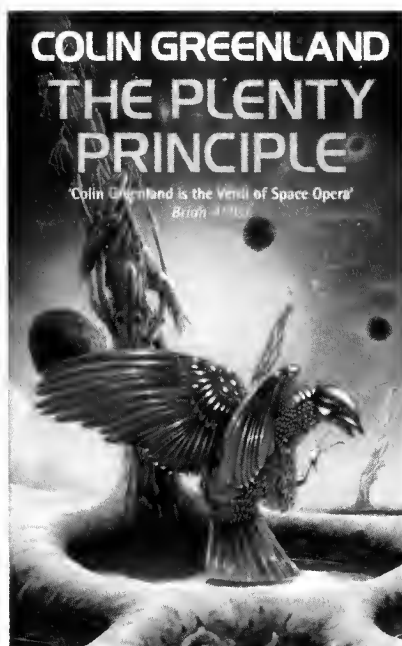
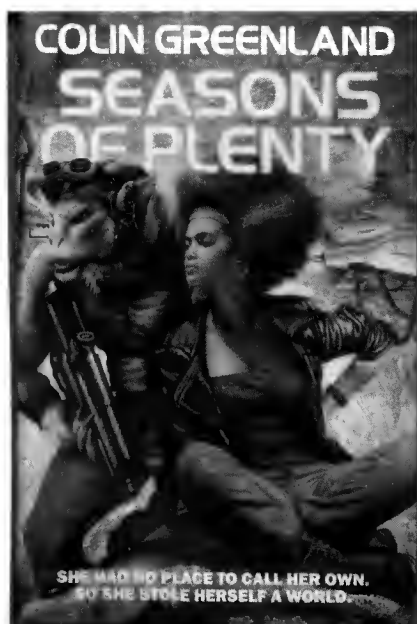
There are people at HarperCollins, good people, pushy people with good address books, who are always putting the idea of *Tabitha and Alice: The Movie* in front of producers, but so far my phone remains unring.

**Brazier:** Who would you most like to play Tabitha?

**Greenland:** To start with I always said: Think Cathy Tyson. My friend Anna Starzynska, who's working on the Wrap Party for *Babylon 5*, she says Scary Spice. Scary Spice would be good. Actually, though, I think what it really is is the sort of project you cast entirely with unknowns. The kind of thing people make their name in, like *Red Dwarf*.

**Brazier:** And your plans for that next novel?

**Greenland:** Consist of little bits of paper with question marks and arrows on them. It's an interesting pile I've been collecting for many years. Something completely different. A book about a man! A man who gets into a car and drives away. I'm writing it longhand in a notebook, in defiance of my new computer. **IZ**



Petra brought the loader to a halt and stared up into the open mouth of the warehouse. She could taste the cold breath of the place at the back of her mouth, dirt and rust, fresh plastic and stale wood. The warehouse was full: there were boxes and crates everywhere, piled high like a child's building blocks. They were stacked up to the ceiling, forming a labyrinth of narrow passages through which you could wander for hours, with no clue as to where you were going but the labels on the sides of the crates: Earth-grown starfish, self-assembly droids and components from the automated sweatshops on Io, tobacco from Mercury, exotic spices from Titan. The Bokha people wanted it all. They wanted so much that supply could hardly keep up with demand. And they paid not in cash but in kind, so the warehouses were always full, either of goods being shipped out of the solar system, or of Bokha goods being shipped in. Petra breathed a cloud of mist into the air, guided the loader back a few metres, and closed the warehouse door. It hummed as it fell shut, and then sighed a filthy sigh as the great, blunt teeth of the door bit into the floor. The sound echoed, dancing away through the gloomy caverns of Storage.

It was a lonely job, but it suited her. She had asked for something which didn't bring her into contact with people, and this was what the agency had found her. There were the Bokha people, of course, silent and enigmatic, hiding inside their pressurized cocoons; but no humans, except the occasional trucker or maintenance tech. Otherwise the place was empty, a huge honeycomb of warehouses deep inside a disused asteroid. Somewhere far above, outside the disk of the solar system, the Bokha wormhole hung in space, swallowing the exports, spitting out the imports. Petra didn't need to worry about that. All she had to do was make sure that everything in Storage went to the right place, and everything was accounted for.

Sometimes it was hard to remember what she had done before. If she thought about it at all – which was a rare occurrence – she would recall that she had been part of a shipping crew herself, bouncing back and forth between Earth and the Jovian system, spending most of her time in short-term stasis. Then she had met Kai. After that, she didn't remember any more. Not that she was unable to; but she preferred not to think about him. Storage was a good place for not thinking. There were always a hundred trivial tasks to be carried out, undemanding in themselves, but each one just absorbing enough to divert her mind from dwelling on anything other than what lay immediately before her. She liked it here.

She guided the loader through the honeycomb to another warehouse, one which still contained some free space. There was another of the Bokha people lurking at the junction between two passages, its smooth, pale cocoon rooted to the iron grille of the walkway. The cocoon cast a faint glow in the darkness of the honeycomb, and Petra stared at it as she went past, without any fear of offending the Bokha inside; they didn't seem to take offence at anything, and in fact generally acted as if she wasn't there at all. That would have been intolerable behaviour in a human, but in the Bokha it seemed quite natural; and it suited Petra well enough.



It allowed her to watch them. This one was apparently resting, or at least it was lying motionless at the bottom of its cocoon. She could make out only a vague shadow, which was as much as anyone had ever seen. If she looked more closely, she might be able to distinguish a number of crab-like limbs. Then she looked away: she was struck by an uncomfortable sensation, something like *déjà vu*. Maybe it wasn't a good idea to stare at the Bokha people, after all.

She lifted the crate into place, and noted it on her inventory. This box was a consignment of comprehensive histories of the system, presumably in multi-access form, though there were no details on the inventory. That was what Kai had done: he had been a historian. An unimportant one, he had always insisted, dealing only with recording the progress of the primitive Free Worlds, the outermost planets. Really, his only job was to set down as much as he could about the present, so that later generations would have a reliable record; and, as he always complained, it was an impossible task. No record could ever really convey the reality of history. The best that could be managed was a vague impression. Petra closed her eyes tight as she caught herself thinking of him, and muttered a curse, which multiplied into a thousand more curses as it echoed through the honeycomb.

She was trembling. Frustrated, annoyed with herself, she gripped the controls of the loader and reversed out of the warehouse. For some reason the handles were slippery beneath her hands: inexplicably, in the cold air of Storage, she was sweating. A moment later she was falling, tumbling from the loader's cabin, slamming her head into the vehicle's steel body, and then crashing to the floor. A line of sour blood ran from the corner of her mouth; she could feel it crawling down her cheek. The inventory flew away from her, skimming over the floor and then rebounding off the wall. She just had time to

wonder what was happening, why she had fallen, before she blacked out.

When she awoke, she saw nothing but a pale glow. Her head was spinning, and she felt a little nauseous, but she wasn't scared. Instead she was oddly calm, relaxed, quite untroubled by the gradual realization that she seemed, like the light, to be floating in the air. Then she woke up a little more, and saw that she was being carried along in the metal mandibles of one of the Bokha cocoons. She had no idea where she was being taken, but the feeling of calm stayed with her. She had never been this close to one of the Bokha before, and turned her head, curious, to see if she could make anything out behind the heavy membrane of the cocoon. There wasn't much to see, though, through the milky fluid in which the Bokha people lived. Petra could see nothing she hadn't seen before – though she hadn't realized that the front section of the Bokha body was so large. It was bigger than the abdomen, if terms like abdomen applied to the aliens.

She felt the cocoon slide to a halt, and then she was being lowered into something soft. It was a bed: she had been carried to the automedic. The cocoon drifted away, out of sight, and the automedic droid leaned over her, wearing a pre-programmed anxious expression.

"Do you remember what happened to you?"

Petra shook her head, slowly. "I fell out of the loader. After that... I don't know. I think I must have been hallucinating."

The automedic was busily connecting monitor patches to her wrists, and to her temples. "Preliminary scans show no damage inconsistent with your fall. There is nothing to explain why you might have lost consciousness." It shone a light into one of her eyes, then into the other. "What did you see?"

"I don't know. Weird things. Alien things. Bokha things, I suppose."

"Such as?"

Petra sighed, and closed her eyes, thinking back. "There were things like bulbs, light-bulbs, except they were organic, growing in a bunch, like grapes or something. There were pieces of machinery, computer parts maybe, but crystalline. They looked shiny, or sticky, as if they were wet. What else? There was something I couldn't identify at all, it just seemed like an abstract shape made of bamboo or insulated wire, something like that. Then there was a pile of things shaped like shellfish, but they looked like they were carved out of some kind of stone, sandstone maybe. Each one was covered in tiny hieroglyphs, and each one had a hole at one end, like an interface jack." She shook her head again. "That's all. There was more, I think, but I can't remember what it was. I didn't understand any of it."

The automedic rolled back a little from the bed, and Petra stared at it. There was a small sound, which Petra guessed was the sound of the psych program being transferred up from the hard disk.

"I would suggest that those images are consistent with items of Bokha origin that are currently in Storage," it said, and Petra thought its voice was subtly changed, though she couldn't be sure.

"I suppose so. I passed one of the Bokha people just before I fell. In fact, that was almost the last thing I

saw. That's probably what caused the hallucinations. I must have been thinking about the goods being made ready for transportation."

The automedic paused, meaningfully, before asking its next question. "Had you ever seen these items before?"

Petra thought about it, then shook her head. "Some of them, maybe. I don't remember. I might have seen them without really registering them." This was a weak rationalization, she knew. Every Bokha artefact was interesting; there were none she would have simply glanced at, and then ignored and forgotten.

"Do you have any psi abilities?"

"Of course not," Petra snapped, irritated by the droid's manner. "If I had, I wouldn't be working in Storage. Either I'd be with the bartering delegation, or I'd be somewhere else entirely. You can check my records. I didn't even register latent abilities." Then, realising that the automedic must already have examined her records, she demanded: "Why do you ask?"

"There is the possibility that constant exposure to Bokha communication might have awakened a latent ability in you. Since we know almost nothing of the medium through which telepathic messages are transferred, we can't be sure, but the theory of inadvertent psi activation was put forward quite seriously in a recent paper by..."

"I don't want to know. I don't want to know! Do you have to run another psi test, then? I take it there's nothing else wrong with me."

"Some minor bruising," the droid replied, reverting, she thought, to its usual voice and personality. "We may have to conduct further tests, but we have had an order to postpone them."

"From who?" Petra sat very still. Any order that had the authority to override the local automedic had to be important.

"From the Bokha embassy."

Petra lay back in the bed, her head spinning once more.

Three days later, she found herself sitting uncomfortably in the only conference room on Storage, between the Bokha Ambassador and an official from the Earth Citizens' Committee. The Earther was in full ceremonial gear, worn over a sky-blue evening gown which trailed along the floor. She looked out of place in the austere surroundings: the conference room was empty – it had hardly ever been used in all the time that Storage had been trading – and the viewscreen offered nothing more splendid than a real-time view of the asteroid belt outside. The Bokha Ambassador had no insignia or official costume, nothing to mark it out, to human eyes at least, as being any different from any other member of its species. Petra had no idea what was supposed to happen at the meeting. She had not even been told whether it was supposed to be formal or informal, and she had not dared to call the Earth embassy to ask; so she had just worn her uniform. As it turned out, she felt more comfortable in that than she would have done in anything else.

"Petra," the Earther began, "we understand that you had an... unpleasant experience in the honeycomb."

Petra nodded, though it had really not been that bad, and she was already back at work. The Earther was



wearing a perfume that smelled for too sweet for use in space.

"I think," the Earther continued, "that the Bokha people are quite anxious to avoid any repetition of this kind of accident. After all, it is potentially dangerous. A worker could be injured, goods could be damaged; or one of our guests' cocoons could be ruptured. That would be a disaster."

The Bokha Ambassador spoke, through a translator; its voice was interpreted as being male, using a very precise mode of enunciation. "We are beginning to understand what happened," the machine's voice said. "The accident happened just after you had passed one of our people in the corridor; and also, just after you had consulted your inventory."

"Yes."

"And the contents of that particular crate triggered a memory of another human."

Petra stared at the Bokha Ambassador, and said, more carefully, "Yes."

"An unwanted memory," the Ambassador continued. "A memory you would have preferred to have been kept, shall we say, in storage."

"Yes," Petra said for the third time, and was about to demand an explanation. How did they know what she had been thinking about? And why should it be important? It was none of their business, after all. She wondered whether they knew that she had been unable to remember anything about Kai since the accident. It was as if all her memories of him had been erased. She kept telling herself that that was exactly what she wanted, that she had come to Storage with nothing else in mind; but she didn't believe it.

The Earther raised a hand, before Petra could say anything. "This is rather delicate. The reason this involves our two embassies is that your accident could lead to embarrassment, maybe even some resentment towards the Bokha people." She looked away, into the viewscreen, watching the lifeless rocks drifting past outside. "You see, the Bokha you passed in the honeycomb was keeping its own inventory of the goods being bartered. That's why there are Bokha people in Storage, after all. They have basically the same job that you do. But the Bokha don't keep their inventories in any physical form. They don't use a pen and paper; they don't use a scratchpad."

Petra drew in a deep breath, suddenly understanding.

"Unfortunately," came the synthetic voice of the Bokha Ambassador, "the one drawback of telepathic communication is the difficulty of making what you would call 'hard copy.' Creating physical representations is so time-consuming. So my people make notes in nearby minds. Your minds serve this purpose quite well. Of course, we take care that those sections of memory are not already being used."

Petra nodded. She looked from the Bokha Ambassador to the Earther, and back again. "So what went wrong?"

"Our auditor saw a section of your mind to which all... pointers, if you like, had been removed. It assumed that that area of memory was free, and so it imposed a copy of its inventory there. Of course, that area of your memory was not free at all, and the two

sets of information interfered with each other – as you found out when you tried to access the area."

"When I thought about Kai."

"Yes. If it makes you feel any better, our auditor had a similarly unpleasant experience when it tried to read its inventory." The Bokha Ambassador shifted slightly inside the milky fluid. "We have reconstructed the information that was corrupted. Would you like us to restore that information to you?"

Petra thought of all her memories of Kai, the memories she had thought were lost. She found that she couldn't speak, so she nodded.

At once, she began to feel dizzy. There was an uncomfortable sensation, something like *déjà vu*; then she felt the alien memories, the inventory, disappear from her mind. Instead, her own memories began to return to her, as vivid as if she were experiencing them for the first time: meeting Kai aboard ship, en route to Europa; dancing at the X a.m. club; laughing at a joke which no one else could share; making love in free-fall. And a simpler thing: the scent of him. Then the memories changed, as if she were seeing them through a darker lens. She would spend weeks or months in stasis, sometimes dreaming of him, while he worked at the Free Worlds History Centre; he would be there when she awoke, but each time he seemed a little more distant. Then, at last, the memory she had tried to shut away. He told her he wanted to go into stasis himself. Not for a journey, but for the Centre. The idea was that someone in the future could revive him, and gain a first-hand description of life in the past. He was serious about it. He had always been so insistent that the dead records of the past were only half the story; it would be better if you could speak to someone who had actually been there. For a long time, she hated him. When he went into stasis, she didn't say goodbye. She made sure she was at the other end of the system, picking up a consignment of raw minerals from Mercury. Afterwards, she went to visit him in his stasis cocoon, and then she did say goodbye, but knew that he couldn't hear her. She imagined him waking up, after centuries had passed, knowing that he was all alone in an unfamiliar world. She wished she could go into stasis with him, but she didn't have the money. The Centre had paid a huge amount to put even one person in long-term stasis. Instead, she resigned from the trading ship and came to Storage, where, she thought, nothing could remind her of him.

The memories faded away, and Petra covered her face with her hands.

The Earther said, softly, "We can arrange to have you placed in long-term stasis along with Kai, if that is what you want."

Petra said nothing.

The Bokha Ambassador said: "Our people will bear the cost – though naturally we cannot pay in cash – if your people will make the necessary arrangements."

Petra lifted her head, and sighed. She managed a half-smile.

"I'll miss Storage," she said at last. "I liked it here."

---

**Alexander Glass's** first two published stories, "Carla's Eye" and "Upgrade," appeared in our last two issues, numbers 130 and 131. He is 24 and lives in London.

## ANSIBLE LINK



DAVID LANGFORD

Overheard on Radio 4's *Start the Week* (March): "There's wonderful science fiction and literature about robots." Nice to know the important distinction between sf and literature is being maintained...

## THE MARCH OF SLIME

**Arthur C. Clarke** issued an April press release saying that police investigation had demolished the *Sunday Mirror*'s paedophilia charges as fabrications.

**Lester del Rey**'s supposed full name was Ramon Felipe San Juan Mario Silvio Enrico Smith Heathcourt-Brace Sierra y Alvarez-del Rey y de los Verdes (*SF Encyclopedia*). Recent efforts to settle his estate (he died intestate) led to word that he was in fact just Ramon Alvarez y del Rey, which was then corrected by "reliable gossip" to ... Leonard Stamm.

**Archie Goodwin** (1937-1998), noted US comics writer and editor since 1965, died on 1 March aged 60. He scripted stories for numerous superhero characters including Batman, Spider-Man and the Hulk, won the genre's Shazam and Eisner Awards, and was editor-in-chief for Warren (*Creepy*, *Eerie* etc) and Marvel before becoming a group editor at DC for the last nine years of his life.

**Captain W. E. Johns** has been slightly unproductive since his death in June 1968, but after 30 years his estate has reportedly allowed publication of Johns's final, unfinished Biggles novel *Biggles Does Some Homework*, 97th in the series. With a commercial acumen that drew gasps of awe from the Tolkien estate, this was confined to a one-time-only limited edition of 300 numbered copies — already sold out.

**Ken McLeod** is the latest author to court publicity in this column by writing me into his fiction. Ha! I flick my fingers at him! I am not so easily lured into mentioning pages 40-41 of *The Cassini Division*....

**Archie Mercer**, a popular old-time British sf fan who was variously active in fanzines, convention organization and the British SF Association from the 1950s well into the 1970s, died on 21 March. Some fans fondly remember his novel *The Meadows of Fantasy* (privately produced, 1965), which describes and pokes gentle fun at the idiosyncrasies of fandom.

**Antonio Prohias**, the Cuban-born cartoonist who drew *Mad* magazine's sometimes science-fictional *Spy vs Spy* strip (1960-1990), died in February aged 77.

**Ian Stewart** was on *Desert Island Discs* (Radio 4, Mar) and managed to plug a coming book co-written with Jack Cohen. His luxury object: a Damien Hirst statue of Margaret Thatcher in a tank of formaldehyde. He didn't say why he wanted it, and Sue Lawley was too cautious to ask.

## INFINITELY IMPROBABLE

**Publishers & Sinners.** *Omni On-Line* has been cancelled and all staff laid off; it continues as a "static" web site.... Official Wired Books response to eager query about the scheduling of John Shirley's *Eclipse*: "Wired Books has decided not to continue with the Cortex series. The rest of the series (including *Eclipse*) has been cancelled. The titles published are: *Artificial Kid*, *White Light* and *The Silicon Man*." Previously, hot denials of any cancellation had been issued. Sad news: as J. M. Barrie almost said, every time an sf imprint dies the Demon of Illiteracy claps his hands.

**Blurbismo.** Time-Life Books circular for its new series *Myth and Mankind*: "Fight with Lancelot. Feast with Arthur. Make love with Guinevere. And save 45% while you're at it."

**Hugos & Controversy.** As *Interzone* goes to press I haven't seen the final 1998 Hugo nomination list, but spies report that British representation includes (at the least) the Clute/Grant *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* as Best Related Work, Jim Burns as Professional Artist, *Interzone* as Semiprozine, and the fanzines *Ansible* and *Attitude*. Oh, and me too, I'm afraid. This year's nominations also revived the *SF Weekly* Hugo status wars. The Big-Endian position is that since this web site's notional circulation is far beyond the defining "pro" level of 10,000, it must be a prozine; the Little-Endians — who include the Hugo administrators — feel that although prozines start at 10,000, semiprozines do not necessarily stop there (despite what the Hugo rules seem to say), and that *SFW* is a semiprozine. The Dunno faction is still wondering whether a web site has a print run at all: ever so many readers, but only one copy....

**Was It Donatello?** Wild turtles could not persuade me to print the long extract from Dan Gallagher's *The Pleistocene Redemption* — selected for the author's own PR as a specially good bit — in which a "monstrous turtle" subtly makes its presence known: "It sliced off Abrih's entire jaw from ear to ear, just missing the carotid artery and jugular vein. Abrih's upper larynx, ripped completely out of his neck, formed a lump of bloody sinew and cartilage floating from the right side of the hungry reptile's hideous head." Further hostilities take us into Thog's *Elegant Variations Masterclass* as in rapid succession this turtle becomes "the eight foot long horror," "the voracious monster," "the vicious animal," "the nightmarish turtle," "the *Meiolaria*" (thrice), "the horrendous eating machine," "the monster," "the grotesque turtle," "the gigantic spiked turtle" and "the terror," all in four very busy paragraphs. Thog smack lips....

**Flowers of Rhetoric.** From the US "Lauray of Salisbury" plant catalogue: "EPIPHYLLUMS. Small Flowered Hybrids [...] 'Ursula Le Guin' — Broad, deep raspberry pink petals form tulip-shaped funnel. Recurved sepals have beige overtones. [...] 'Robert Silverberg' — Small, satiny, watermelon red flowers, recurved petals. Free flowering, basket type growth."

**Small Press.** "Over £1m a year for writers — are you getting your share?" is the alluring blurb of *Prizes, Grants & Bursaries 1998* (211pp, £6.99). Writers' Bookshop, 7-11 Kensington High St., London W8 5NP. Meanwhile, *Light's List 1998* (13th year of publication) gives 1,200+ small press titles, addresses and brief descriptions. A5, 56pp. £1.50 post free: John Light, 37 The Meadows, Berwick upon Tweed, TD15 1NY.

**The SF Encyclopedia's 1995** Grolier CD-ROM has been reissued by Focus Multimedia at £9.99 ... which came as a total surprise to editors John Clute & Peter Nicholls.

**Thog's Masterclass.** *Dept of Vacuum Physics*: "It completed the move with its laser firing in the direction of the incoming ship, which swerved to avoid contact with the beam." At sublight speeds, too. (Robert J. Sawyer, *Starplex*, 1996) ... "No book is written in a vacuum, especially a mystery, since inside a vacuum, it's too dark to type." (Rosemary Edghill, *The Bowl of Night*) ... "The tea in the cups shimmered, along with the tears brimming over her eyes." (Paul Levinson, "The Copyright Notice Case," *Analog* 4/96) ... *Dept of Privy Purposes*: "As for me, I scavenged funnels and lengths of tubing and, in the privacy of an old lean-to, began conducting intense private experiments." (Stephen Baxter, *The Time Ships*, 1995)



# MUTANT POPCORN

Nick Lowe

Serious sf is no place for amateurs. Any idiot can tell a tale that struts and frets for 100 minutes upon the screen, full of sound and fury and signifying zippo. The trouble starts when people who've never made an sf film in their lives breeze in and try to transcend a genre they don't understand in the first place. The only time Barry Levinson tried anything remotely like this, he made *Toys*; yet here he is behind the helm of *Sphere*. From Michael Crichton, Author Of *Jurassic Park* And *Er The Lost World* ("it looks great but sounds crap," said the woman behind me at the trailer, unerringly). To make matters harder, Crichton's 1987 novel is deeply substandard, a dashed-off concatenation of mechanical suspense set-pieces unredeemed by anything much in the way of MC's trademark cranky tirades about technology, original sin, and unbottled genies. The modest potential of its core idea is fluffed in a perfunctory finale, while the plot is formulaic to the point of self-parody: put together a small team of technical experts, send them into a classified situation in an exotic environment to encounter the violent unknown, and pick 'em off in a cascade of knuckle-whitening siege sequences.

Crichton's novel set itself up around a McGuffin from outer space: a US spacecraft from the future that's arrived at the bottom of the ocean bearing a colossal alien sphere from the other end of a wormhole, and the 100-million-dollar question is *What's inside the Sphere?* And the novel's trick solution, so weakly tossed-off that it seems little more than a lazy copout, is that the question itself is the point: that the sphere simply reflects the inquirer's anxieties, preoccupations, and paranoia back in a magnified and reified

form, giving hallucinatory substance to our dreams and desires for reasons that themselves remain provocatively inscrutable. (One suggestion, for example, is that the sphere is a test of our readiness for contact, which – this being Crichton – we fail dismally by succumbing to reflex sf suspense routines.)

To their credit, Levinson and his writers are clearly more interested than Crichton himself was in the cleverer implications of this conclusion, which on one level stands for the story itself and the genre in which it's embedded. One thing that seems to have enticed Levinson and his hand-picked team of trusted longtime associates (notably star Dustin Hoffman, and writer Paul Attanasio) is the conceit that the sf encounter is simply a means to magnify human tensions under claustrophobic conditions. As such, it's a concept that openly deconstructs the mechanics of Crichtonian sf, a project unwisely replicated in some of the quirkier features of narrative style. Set-pieces end strangely in midair, building to a climax of suspense and preposterousness and then cutting sedately to the aftermath. The episodic structure is intertitled with chapter headings marking off each genre plot segment as it arrives (The Surface, The Deep, The Spacecraft, The Sphere, The Power, The First Exchange, Battle Stations, Further Analysis, Decompression), calling explicit attention to the mechanical familiarity of situations and structure alike. Even the dialogue seems so formulaic and recycled ("It's 80 yards and closing! Norman, get out of there! 40 yards! Move, move, move, move, move! 20 yards!") that you start to suspect some higher ironic purpose: that the ghosts of *Solaris*, *The Abyss*, *Event Horizon* and a dozen other, better films are being projected back at

us to confront us with the detritus of our own dreams.

The trouble with all this is that *Sphere*, for all its attempted knowingness, is a movie by people inexperienced in sf, who simply haven't logged the hours of immersion needed to explore the genre's poetics at this depth. Any audience who has read more than two novels by Lem, Dick, or Watson will have come up with ten to twenty more interesting answers to "What's inside the sphere?" by the time the two-hour mark comes around and we're given the authors' solution (that, er, it's the power to project dreams and sting Queen Latifah to death with a school of giant psychic jellyfish). In particular, it's a crime against all that's thrilling and tingly in real sf done by real sf professionals that the disorienting narrative rug-pulls of the final act aren't pursued to the end twist that any experienced sf submariner will be expecting, and which would redeem all the longueurs at a stroke. It's a devastating demonstration of the makers' insensitivity to the material that they can't see that the answer to "What's inside the sphere?" *has* to be one of the variations of "We are." Instead, the trio of celebrity spheronauts escape from their brief immersion in sf back to the surface; debate what to do with their visionary talents ("We're given the greatest gift in the history of mankind, the power to make our dreams come true"); and tellingly opt to forget the whole thing, bending the narrative back on itself in a circular closure that leaves the topside world untouched and the sf artefact to whizz off back into space, its mission here accomplished.

Not necessarily better, but incomparably more interesting, is Kiwi expat Andrew Niccol's writing/direct-



ing debut *Gattaca*, as outsiderly and un-studiolike as *Sphere* is inside-track Hollywood through and through. *Gattaca* is, in the best sense, a success of style over substance: a thin, portentous, and perilously humourless script, performed by miscast leads who aren't really up to it, and yet so different in concept, pace, and style from normal Hollywood sf as to seem fresher and more daring than its 1970s-style totalitarian dystopics really warrant. Effectively a *THX 1138* for the 90s, it packages a reasonably thoughtful and very felicitously timed extrapolanza on designer eugenics in a shaky plot with a lumbering pace and a very silly climax indeed. The setup is a sufficiently nice idea (in-valid de-gene-rate scams his way into the thoroughbred elite on borrowed genes so that he can represent humanity to the stars) that the clumsy murder-mystery counterplot, with its near-total lack of eligible suspects, can be forgiven as the junk code needed to carry the fragments of content. Above all, and in potent contrast to *Sphere*, it's so unembarrassed by its genre that it's unnervingly prepared to dispense with pretty much anything resembling irony.

How much it all amounts to is hard to say. There's nothing exactly new, though plenty that's shrewdly topical, in the forward projection of current debate on the human-rights implications of genome mapping and the ownership, abuse, and exploitation of human genetic data. Certainly a lot of what passes for earnest prophecy is little more than meretricious posturing with pop genetics for its own sake: it's never even explained, for example, why *Gattaca* itself is so called, unless it's that *Act Gaga at a Cat Tag* might code for the wrong kind of expectations. The dialogue is ear-curling, Uma Thurman still can't act for penny chews, and the whole thing takes itself way too seriously; yet it's so elegantly styled by Niccol the director and his posse of Greenaway veterans that the many gaucheries in the script become themselves part of its distinctive, European flavour, embarrassing but unembarrassed in exactly the way that most Hollywood attempts at serious sf can't quite bring themselves to be.

Just as solemn and self-fancying, but much less rewarding, is *Fallen*, in which second-generation serious screenwriter Nicholas Kazan attempts a serious, literary, grownup film about a cop hunting a millennia-old demonic serial killer. Simply as a mechanical thriller – the only level on which it comes close to succeeding – it squeezes a couple of good set-pieces from its quite-neat central idea of the mean streets as playground for a villain who travels from actor to actor by contact (yes, it's *that* metaphor again). But it's only a matter of time before an ancient tome is unearthed that reveals

the Arbitrary Rule by which the immortal, indestructible, body-hoppingly uncatchable Elias Koteas may in fact be caught and killed – here some contrived guff about only being able to survive out of the body for 500 cubits, leaving you to scratch head and puzzle why he doesn't just get in the car and drive 501 cubits away in the hopelessly-convoluted finale.

Nevertheless, this is another fantasy debut with aspirations to rise above itself, and the script is relentlessly tricked out with flags of literariness. A novelistic voiceover, with a trick revelation at the end, allows little flowers of writerly prose against the grain of genre ("I like the night: the streets, the smells, the sense of another world. Sometimes you come face to face with yourself," &c.). The plot revolves around books, many of them awkwardly torchlighted on-screen in a misjudged attempt to convey cinematically the experience of reading text. (Luckily all hard-to-find tomes on demonology turn out to be large-format and lavishly illustrated, so slow readers can just look at the pictures.) And for a man of the street, Washington's own dialogue is surprisingly erudite: "Everything's personal if you're a person," he opines, in a knowing paraphrase of the famous line singled out in the entry on Terence in *World's Great Men of Color* as African humanism's plea to the world for equality under the sun.

But some minorities are more minor than others, and while Hollywood may pat itself on the back for the gift of Denzel Washington, there's a long, long way to go before it will tolerate the survival of human weakness. Like the disabled Jude Law in *Gattaca* who obligingly self-incinerates once his role in the plot is done, Washington's defective brother is expendable from the start. ("He's a spaz," says his boy, in a flagrant plea for dad to be demonically murdered and manly Denzel to adopt him.) Like every other film where some are selected to live and some to die nastily in daft set-pieces, *Fallen* implements a none-too-subtle eugenics of the narratively privileged that shows precisely what human defects mark most of us out as in-valids: incorrect physique (especially obesity), charisma deficiency, poor facial hair, English accent... Like *Gattaca*, it wears its liberalism skin-deep and its morality as a fashion accessory. *Fallen* tries hard to pretend that we're all equal under God, with equal free will, and that the only difference between us is where we put our cross when we find ourselves in the booth: "When our moment comes, you do the right thing, or the wrong." But the sad truth is that most of us are just too far down the credits even to qualify for the franchise, let alone to make it back to the surface.

Nick Lowe

# Tube Corn

Wendy Bradley

BC Scotland appear to have had, shall we say, somewhat limited resources for their flagship production, *Invasion: Earth*. Resources which consisted, as far as I could tell, of (a) Scotland, (b) the RAF, and (c) £47.52 or thereabouts. So we had lots and lots of Scottish landscape – yes, yes, an intrinsic pleasure to look at of itself, and certainly more interesting than the usual gravel pit which signals "this is sci-fi" – but not necessarily the most sensible place to try and make us believe all this action was taking place. Similarly we saw lots and lots of blokes in uniforms running around showing off their hardware (now stop it: this isn't a Frankie Howerd sketch where you can write your own jokes) but not much in the way of SFX or visible dosh on screen. The pyrotechnics, in particular, were about as cheesy as you could get. I'm not exactly what you'd call an expert arsonist myself but I can recognize when a building looks plausibly on fire and distinguish it from when it just looks as though someone's put a canister or two of crumpled up newspaper behind a window and chucked in a match.

So I watched the preview tape of the first episode and came away quite happy with a page of notes that I was confident I could turn into a 1500-word slagging off without too much difficulty.

But then BBC Scotland had to go and spoil it all by letting me have, not one but three, episodes to preview. And I thought I'd better play fair and watch them all before I ripped into them. And then I had to tear up my notes and start again because, would you Adam and Eve it, in episode two it actually got *good*. I started to care what happened to the characters. I started to care where the plot was going. I started to believe that, when the real aliens land, the military will run around exactly like this particular set of headless chickens. I started to care.

So I watched episode three and, heaven help me, by the end of that I was cursing the press office for sending me three episodes without episodes 4, 5 and 6. Talk about stringing out the suspense. I'm writing this at beginning of April: how can I possibly wait until the serial is broadcast in May and June to find out how it ends?

This is all most unusual.

Surely we aren't supposed to have science-fiction programmes made for grown-ups. Surely we aren't supposed to have science-fiction programmes where we care what's going to happen. Surely we aren't supposed to have science-fiction programmes made in the UK which don't have us cramming our fists in our mouths and rolling around the carpet in hysterics. Surely we aren't supposed to have science-fiction programmes that are, well, *good*. Bloody hell.

So let's start at the beginning. In black-and-white 1944, against those horribly cheesy pyrotechnics, we see Anton Lesser acting his socks off as the sensitive lieutenant in a bomb-disposal unit. Only it isn't a V2 rocket he's been sent to deal with but a UFO. Yes! Sod Roswell – plucky *British* UFOs at last. (Well, didn't you ever wonder why the UFOs never bother to strut their stuff over here?)

Then we jump to the present day and meet up with our hero, a doughty RAF flyboy. Unfortunately we have to spend a little time establishing he's the footloose-and-fancy-free one as opposed to the married-with-responsibilities (subtext – doomed) one: the Starbuck, not the Apollo. And this seems to require him to deliver some frankly unspeakable dialogue: "hang onto your handbag, fat boy" was my favourite. Has anyone, in any universe, ever been able to deliver a line like that credibly? Roll it around your tongue for a moment and try to conceive of a situation in which you could say it and still look at yourself in a mirror, hmm?

Finally there is our heroine, the SETI scientist who set off for Scotland at a second's notice and managed to bump into the flyer in an empty pub in the middle of the Highlands so she could deliver the immortal line, "I'm a mad scientist and she's my beautiful daughter." Look, stick with it, OK? It does get better, trust me.

What's going on is never entirely clear, at least not up to the end of episode three, but there is a UFO contact shot down by our hero, a signal from the mothership intercepted by our heroine and a captured UFO pilot who turns out to be Anton Lesser wrapped in bacofoil. The usual *X-Files/Independence Day* scenario is shaken up and slightly foxed by there being not one but two sets of aliens Out There and by Lesser's character's infuriating taciturnity. There are alien abductions and the usual unexplained medical probings of the abductees. There are bull-headed military types doing lots of shouting, volume without content.

But it works. It's fresh. It's a slightly quirky, ever so slightly, well, British I suppose, take on the familiar alien-invasion paradigm. Why, when we finally do get a look at a "real" captured alien it even looks like a Grey as designed by Laura Ashley.

It fair makes you proud to be British, especially when you see the quality of the acting talent involved. Anton Lesser is superb, as is Sara Kestelman as a Group Captain in the RAF who is also a neurosurgeon and actually makes you believe it. However, presumably because of the co-funding from The Sci-Fi Channel, or at least with an eye to the overseas market, the central power-figure is an American, Fred Ward, playing Major General David Reece, USAF, NATO Commander, with whom the buck stops. However Ward, too, is excellent and it is just about credible that the NATO power structure would give us a Yank on top of the RAF's own power pyramid. I did quibble slightly, though, at the RAF's top dog being a female Squadron Leader, Helen Knox (played with gravitas by Phyllis Logan – *Shooting Fish/Secrets and Lies*? You'll recognize her when you see her). Not that I have any problem with it being a woman in command, duh, but because making the RAF's top dog a woman reduces her to a helpmeet role in relation to Reece when you have a sneaky feeling that in real life the Brits would be phoning Whitehall and the Yank would be phoning the Pentagon and all this unanimity might be a tad harder to put into practice. But, hey, I'm not in the military so what do I know? Maybe NATO really is a multinational source of peace and harmony working together for the common good.

The female roles in *Invasion: Earth* (as opposed to in the RAF) are, however, satisfyingly crunchy with

never a fainting shrinking violet in sight. I particularly liked our heroine's attempt to communicate with the outside world when kidnapped by aliens via self-mutilation, reasoning that if she scratched "nD" – the sign for multiple dimensions – onto her arm then, even if she were returned to earth memory-wiped or dead, at least the message that her abductors used higher dimensions would get through. I like a heroine with guts and brains. She even explained the concept of higher dimensions to a traumatized fellow-abductee in terms which meant, for a fleeting moment, that I felt I understood what she was talking about. Well, I said fleeting.

One last word: the most chilling quote in the press release comes from Jed Mercurio, the writer and producer of *Invasion: Earth*, in response to a question about whether he likes the sf genre: "I have been a science-fiction fan since I was a kid. I don't read science fiction but I really like science-fiction movies." Yes, there you have it, it's over: you can be a science-fiction fan without *reading* the stuff at all. RIP.

Wendy Bradley can be contacted on [wbradley@easynet.co.uk](mailto:wbradley@easynet.co.uk)

Below: *Invasion: Earth* – "...a captured UFO pilot who turns out to be Anton Lesser wrapped in bacofoil."



# Segue

## segue

*Keith Brooke*

### I: PROLOGUE

The man is lean and pale-skinned, wandering through the twilight streets of the hill town, apparently lost. His Levi's and hiking boots mark him out as a westerner – not a climber, maybe a tourist or a middle-class drop-out following the hippie trail his dad has told him all about.

He squints at the crowd squeezing into the shabby little mosque, their jellabas the same grubby dun-grey as the streets and buildings.

Minutes earlier, the man has heard the muezzin calling out over the roof-tops – to the faithful, not to him.

Soon, the man is alone in the deserted street. Here in the valley, it has grown rapidly dark, whilst the mountain tops burn vividly with the last remnants of the escaping sun. The perspective is quite dizzying: the man can look so far up and still see mountain where there should be sky.

He is still looking up when he senses a presence at his shoulder.

A hand seizes his arm.

"Hey!" he gasps, but the cold line of the blade against his throat stops him from saying or doing anything further.

His arm is twisted up behind his back and he is forced to his knees.

A man appears before him, lets loose a torrent of Kashmiri. The westerner peers up. The man is wearing a drab jellaba, with a fold of the grey material twisted around his head in a kind of turban. There are at least four men now, but the first is clearly their leader. He leans forward and searches the westerner's pockets.

They are empty. No wallet, no papers. Has he left them in his hotel? If they have such a thing as a hotel in a small mountain settlement like this.

The leader of the bandits seizes the westerner's dark

hair, yanking his head brutally to one side.

"You American?" he says. "English? German? Hnh?"

"I..." But the westerner stops. He shrugs, as far as the man twisting his arm will let him. "I'm not exactly sure," he says finally. "I think I may be lost."

### II: CHASING THE STORY

Pat Leahy was halfway through the fattest joint of his life when the wild boy, Gimme, climbed in through his window.

Time was dragging its heels as Leahy registered the sound of the intrusion, the movement of the boy in his room. Gimme could have slit his throat and taken his wallet in the time it took Leahy to realize what was going on. He smiled a big, hundred-dollar smile at the boy who, by now, was sitting on the edge of the old table Leahy used as a desk.

"A man wants to talk to you," said the boy in Kashmiri, speaking slowly for Leahy's benefit. "He says he has work for you." Then, true to Leahy's nickname for the boy, he held out a hand and said his only English phrase, "You gimme cash, mister?"

Leahy was still smiling.

The boy clicked his teeth, then he went over to where Leahy's jacket hung on the back of the door. He took out his wallet and withdrew a crumpled 20-rupee note. "The man's name is Abdullah Nawaz," he said. "You go to Shalimar Bagh tomorrow at midday. He will recognize you."

With that, Gimme jumped up to the sill and slipped out of the window into the sultry darkness of the city.

Leahy stared at the black shape of the window, still smiling.

A ceaseless stream of rickshaws, over-laden taxis, horse-drawn *tongas*, hawkers, soldiers and veiled women filled



the narrow lanes of Srinagar. Leahy hated the city at this time of day. Even after three – or was it four? – years, he detested the heat and the smells.

He shouldered his way through the throng, late and wondering what lay in store for him.

As ever, he relaxed as soon as he entered Shalimar Bagh, a Mogul garden full of running water, fountains, fragrant flowers.

He paused in the sparse shade of a *chenar* tree and surveyed the scene, gently flapping the cloth of his *shalwar kameez*, stirring the hot air about his body. To the tourists who still came to Kashmir despite the troubles he might easily pass as a local, with his clothing and his sun-darkened skin, but to the people of the city he was clearly an outsider, a white man.

“Mr Leahy.”

He turned, nodded in greeting to the tall man who had addressed him.

“And you are...?”

The stranger smiled and nodded his head. He was a Pathan, lean and aristocratic, with his head bound in a kind of turban and his grey beard dyed a vivid red with henna. A man of the country, come down from the mountains, Leahy guessed. “I am indeed,” he said, deflecting Leahy’s enquiry. “I wish to engage your services as a researcher, Mr Leahy.”

“Oh yeah?” said Leahy, warily. “What kind of research?” He guessed he wasn’t exactly going to be checking out this guy’s family tree.

“Some acquaintances of mine wish to discover the identity of a certain individual,” said the man. “I understand you have the kind of contacts that will allow you to achieve this.”

Leahy had come east in response to that horny old cliché: to find himself. These days he found himself stoned out of his head most of the time, supporting himself by rowing tourists around Dal Lake in a *shikara* and by selling occasional stories and features to the western press – with journalists still banned from the occupied territory, there were plenty of opportunities for casual stringers like Leahy. It was clearly his press contacts that this man was referring to.

“What’s the deal?” he asked, suddenly sick of all the subterfuge.

“This man is a guest of my acquaintances,” said Nawaz. “But he appears unwilling to divulge his identity.”

Leahy laughed, a sudden bark of a laugh, startling Nawaz. He’d worked it out – he was sure of it! These “acquaintances” had kidnapped a westerner and they didn’t have a clue who to ask for the ransom! It happened all the time: there were always stories of travellers getting kidnapped by bandit gangs. Often, they were just stories, but Leahy knew enough to take this man seriously.

It took Leahy no time at all to come to a decision. If the stupid sucker held out against them for much longer he’d just be another corpse in a mountain gorge. Find out who he was and he might just get out in one piece. At any rate, there was a story in it for Leahy. It was months since he’d had anything like this.

“Okay,” he said to Nawaz. “It’s going to cost you. You’re going to have to tell me everything about this ‘guest.’ Okay?”

Nawaz tipped his head and smiled. “Naturally,” he

said. He turned and started to walk through the gardens. “My acquaintances encountered the man in a remote village in Baltistan,” he told Leahy. “He was confused and claimed to be lost.”

Baltistan was a bleak, semi-desert region, deep in the Karakorum Mountains. It was less than a hundred miles from Srinagar, but Leahy had never been there. Technically, the region was under Pakistani control, but in truth it was as lawless as any part of Kashmir. You’d have to be a fool to travel there alone.

“He must have had papers,” said Leahy. “A visa, a passport... tickets, maybe? Letters? Anything like that?”

Nawaz shook his head. “He had none of these things. If he had, then my acquaintances would not require your services.”

Leahy nodded. “What does he look like?” he asked. “Can I meet him? Maybe he’d talk to me.”

Nawaz shook his head again. “It is a long and arduous journey,” he said. “My acquaintances would not welcome you.” Then he reached into his robe and produced a small photograph, which he handed to Leahy.

The picture was fuzzy, with strange washed-out colours. It showed a man in his 20s: pale, with dark collar-length hair. He was wearing jeans – Levi’s, Nawaz assured him – a weatherproof jacket, and new-looking hiking boots. Average height, average build, no distinguishing features.

Leahy tucked the picture into his pocket. It could have been just about anybody, he realized.

Leahy wasn’t too troubled by the vagueness of all this, at first. This was a pretty vague kind of place, full of pretty vague kinds of people. It was probably some fresh-faced young graduate, finished his degree in Media Studies or Accountancy and out to See the World before starting on the nine-to-five.

He knew the type. Innocents abroad, they never knew what they were getting themselves into. You saw them all the time in Srinagar: come up here to “do” the Vale of Kashmir. He’d been one himself, a few years back. This poor sucker had wandered off the usual college-kid trail, too stoned to remember his own name. He’d probably already been robbed before he was kidnapped – that would explain the lack of ID.

Leahy had contacts in the state governor’s office and the local police, but the best way was to start asking around on the street. Even when these kids travelled alone, they always met up with others on the trail – that was what most of them came here for: to get stoned and meet other stoned middle-class kids like themselves. Someone would be missing him before too long, Leahy was sure. Someone would recognize him from the photograph.

Asif Ahmed shrugged, spreading his hands wide. “Forgive me if I appear unenthusiastic,” he told Leahy. “I hear such tales frequently, and usually they are not true. You tell me you are a journalist, but where is your proof of this incident, Mr Leahy?”

Asif was usually one of Leahy’s most useful contacts. He edited a news-sheet that had been proscribed shortly after the state government was dissolved in 1990. Now, he sat back, popped another *barfi* into his mouth and began to chew noisily.

Leahy's proof was the wad of rupees Nawaz had paid him, but he hadn't let on to Asif that he was in the pay of the kidnappers. He rose and thanked Asif for his time.

Asif put a hand on Leahy's back and gestured with his free hand indicating the lake, the spangled mosaic of lotus flowers, water hyacinths and houseboats, and the city spread out beyond. "This is the real world, Mr Leahy," he said. "You would be well advised not to lose sight of it."

Leahy scrambled off Asif's houseboat into his *shikara* and rowed slowly back to the city. He was becoming intrigued. The kid must have passed through Srinagar, but he had left no tracks behind. Leahy had asked around at all the tourist spots – the old fortress, the seventh-century temple – tagging on to little knots of travellers to see if anyone recognized the pale, dark-haired kid in the photograph.

But all he had got for his efforts were a few rupees for selling a Danish girl a bit of grass. His contacts in the police and the governor's office had offered him no more than Asif. He was running out of options.

So, the next day, he crossed over the Line of Control into the Karakorum Mountains. This land was controlled by Pakistan, but in truth it was a tribal, feudal land. Bandit country.

The gangs out here were legendary. So many stories had sprung up about them that truth and popular imagination had long since merged. Most called themselves freedom fighters, but often that was just a cover for gun-running, or drug-smuggling. As Asif had reminded him, a lot of the stories were just tall tales, the local equivalent of the urban legend, but like all such myths, they were founded on reality. He knew there were gangs out here – he'd written enough about them – and his current job was proof enough that they were still at work.

He rode up through the Burzil Pass in the back of a Jeep full of chattering American birders. They weren't worried about the intimidating frequency of the army patrols, or about the national sport of kidnapping westerners – all that concerned them was the lammergeier gliding swiftly around a knuckle of cliff up ahead.

He left them in the town of Udrut. This was the nearest sizeable settlement to the village where the kidnap had taken place. The kid must have passed through here.

A boy with a badly twisted leg tugged at Leahy's *shalwar kameez*, holding a hand up for *baksheesh*. Leahy pulled his clothes free. "Have you seen a white man about as tall as me?" he asked in Kashmiri.

The boy merely looked at him with big eyes. Leahy tossed him a note and turned away, regretting it instantly as other street kids descended on him. He cursed himself. He was acting like a college kid, himself.

He found the bazaar and sure enough, he spotted three westerners arguing with a hawker over some knickknacks. Even out here – a cramped jeep-ride along a rough track with sickening drops to either side – they came. Pretty soon there would be a McDonalds on the corner and a Holiday Inn down by the river.

"Excuse me," he said. He spoke to the hawker and settled a price for the small carving – still ridiculously high, but far cheaper than the girl would have managed.

She smiled at him so gratefully he wondered just *how* grateful, then he remembered why he was here. "I'm

looking for someone," he said. He showed her the picture. "Maybe a friend of yours. I'm trying to track him down. Ring any bells?"

"Hey, you speak real great English," said the girl, with an Australian accent. She was short and blonde, an exoticism out here that made her seem even more beautiful to Leahy.

He shrugged. It was as if he had slipped into a kind of limbo, between east and west. He only seemed authentic to dumb college kids like this one. "I learn good," he said, smiling. Figuring his chances.

Her two friends – a boy with a tufty, adolescent beard, and another skinny blonde – muttered to her, clearly wanting to get her away from Leahy.

"Hey, John, Rache – this guy's looking for someone. Here – he's got a photo. You think that's Doug?"

"Doug?" said Leahy. "A friend of yours? Are you expecting to meet him here?"

The boy shook his head. "Doug's a jerk. And he never came up here – went back down to Goa, I reckon."

The same old story. A lot of people knew someone a bit like Leahy's mystery abductee, but it never quite fitted. He could have been anybody, for Christ's sake.

He woke, his head thumping from the cheap beer and pot.

He struggled with the zip and dragged himself clear of the small tent. The girl – Lizzy – was down by the river, lying naked on a wide flat rock. John and Rache weren't up yet, it seemed.

He went down to the river and plunged into the icy water.

When he rose to the surface she was laughing at him. Jesus, he hadn't done anything like this for ages. Well, weeks, at least.

Later, he lay by her side on the rock, contented again. Lizzy said, "You know what I reckon? I reckon your missing friend is just like you: a Mister Nobody. Living on the fringes, accountable to nobody. Not quite a part of any world, doesn't know where he belongs."

Leahy said nothing. He didn't want to spoil it by arguing. It was a nice idea, and it would explain a lot about how this guy seemed to have left no mark on the world, but Mister Nobody doesn't wander around in Levi's and shiny new hiking boots. That's the kit of a tourist, somebody who *does* belong somewhere, to somebody.

Later, back in the town, he managed to track down a working telephone. Eventually, he got through to the number Nawaz had given him. "Mr Nawaz?" he said, over the random crackles and whizzing sounds of the line. "Progress is slow, I'm afraid. No, no: I have people working on it, we'll have something soon, I'm sure. I followed a lead and I'm in Udrut now. Listen, I really think it would help if I could meet the guy. He's bound to be more forthcoming with me. I can write a story on it, get a bit of publicity. That way we're bound to find out who he is."

Nawaz didn't sound too convinced, but he said he would contact Leahy soon.

They came for him at night. He was staying in what was loosely called a rest-house, sharing a floor with the cockroaches and about a dozen other assorted travellers.

He heard the low voices, and looked up to see the proprietor pointing him out to two men. They led him out-

side to where a third man stood in the dark street.

"Abdullah Nawaz sends his greetings," the man said.

Leahy nodded, wondering what, exactly, he had let himself in for. He thought of Lizzy, relieved that she and her two friends had headed south that morning. "Where are we going?" he asked, although he knew they wouldn't tell him.

They walked. The short man who spoke English led the way and the other two followed behind Leahy. They headed out of the town and up a track into the mountains. The night air was bitterly cold and Leahy pulled his *shalwar kameez* tightly around himself. He had to keep his eyes fixed on the ground, terrified that he would miss his footing in the dark. He hadn't come prepared for this kind of shit, but then, he made himself realize, he hadn't really come prepared for anything. He'd grown lazy, lost touch with the real world.

That night, he was reacquainted with it quite comprehensively.

As dawn lit the snowy peaks gold and silver against an ultramarine sky, they were still walking.

Leahy's feet were bleeding, he could feel it in his shoes. His legs were aching, his feet swinging like lead weights. He felt sick, too – either with altitude or sheer exhaustion.

And up ahead the short leader kept walking, not showing the slightest sign of fatigue.

They came to the camp some time towards the middle of the day, their leader jabbering a greeting to a lone guard in a dialect Leahy didn't recognize. A stream had cut a deep gorge through a high rampart of cliffs. The gorge was in darkness, but as Leahy's eyes became accustomed to the gloom, he made out a group of men camped amid a sparse cluster of pine trees.

When Leahy saw the kidnap victim in the flesh for the first time, what struck him most was his sheer blandness. Ordinary looks, ordinary clothing, ordinary features. It was as if someone had taken every college kid who had ever passed through Kashmir and averaged them all out.

Leahy opted for the direct approach. He went up to the man, who had risen to his feet at their arrival. "Patrick Leahy," he said, holding out his hand. "Pleased to meet you."

The kid just looked at his hand with a dumb smile on his face. "Pleased to meet you, too," he said. "Can you tell me what's happening? Are you with these guys?"

He spoke English with a mid-Atlantic blandness to match his looks.

Leahy stuck with the direct approach. "I'm a journalist," he said. "And I'm covering the story of a young westerner who's been kidnapped. Only nobody knows who he is and nobody is missing him, and if someone doesn't start wanting him to be set free pretty damned soon he's going to end up as vulture meat. You follow what I'm saying?"

He just looked blank.

"Listen, mate. If I can find someone who wants you back, then I can give these guys a good reason to keep you alive. So who are you? Where are you from?"

"I'm sorry," said the kid. "I wish I could help you. But I just can't seem to remember anything much before I met these men."

"It's not me you'll be helping," snarled Leahy. "It's *you*."

He was out of his depth, he realized. Somehow he had just thought it would all fall into place if he could talk to the kid. He turned away, spat into the dry ground. Jesus. What was he *doing* out here?

He tried and tried to figure the kid out. Tried asking him direct questions, tried drawing him by saying dumb things, or contentious things – how Mick Jagger should never have quit the Beatles in '67, or how Adolf Hitler was a pretty neat guy, despite his bad press. But the kid never picked him up on his inaccuracies or outrageous claims.

Leahy found that, most of the time, he couldn't quite take the situation seriously. The anonymous bandits, the unidentified kid – it was as if he had stepped into a story, stepped out of reality. He blamed the dope.

After a hard, cold night, Leahy couldn't take any more. He remembered Asif, his editor friend, warning him not to lose sight of the real world: he had to get back to Srinagar, he had to sort his life out. "Right," he told 'Mohammed,' the leader of the little group of bandits. "I've seen enough. I think I can pin him down if you'll just take me back to Udrit."

Mohammed looked at him impassively.

"Come on," said Leahy, determined not to start begging. Not yet. "You want a name for this guy so you can screw his rich family for some money, no? How are you going to do this if you don't let me find out his name for you?"

Mohammed smiled then. That was when Leahy *knew* he was in a creek-load of shit.

"You have family, Mister Leahy?" said Mohammed. In *such* a reasonable tone.

At first he had suspected that the kid was all a part of it, but his suspicions didn't last long. These bandits didn't need that kind of subterfuge to kidnap a westerner like Leahy. They could just pick them off the streets any time they wanted.

Leahy had walked right in and asked for it. He should have known not to come up into the mountains, but he had felt the pull of a story, a chance to make some kind of name for himself. And also, he had to admit, a chance to maybe help some dumb college kid who could have been him a few years ago.

They stayed in that gloomy ravine for days. They talked, or rather, Leahy talked and the kid listened. It was a kind of catharsis for Leahy, sucking out the bitterness that had accumulated over the years, lancing the boil of his cynicism.

He still couldn't fathom the kid out. It was as if his mind had been completely wiped, returned to a childish naivety. It must be drug-related, he suspected. That was all it could have been.

The escape was over in a matter of seconds.

They were lying in the darkness of the late afternoon, eating tiny portions of *khyatsir* with their fingers. This mush of rice and pulses seemed to be the only thing these bandits ate.

"How long has it been?" asked Leahy. "I'm losing track. It seems so long ago... so far away..." He was rambling, drifting.

A single gunshot echoed around the steep walls of the ravine.



Instantly the bandits were rushing about, shouting. Leahy made out the word *sina* – army. Something must have brought a patrol into this valley. Pakistani or Indian, he didn't care: it was the army!

For a short time, as more gunshots echoed in the ravine, the bandits had forgotten about Leahy and the boy. Leahy took his fellow hostage by the arm and drew him into the shelter of a pile of boulders. "This is our chance," he hissed. "If you spot an opening just run for it as fast as you can. You're still in your western clothes – the soldiers won't shoot at you."

"But what about you, Pat?"

Leahy shrugged. "I'll take my chances too. All I'm saying is that your chances are better, okay?"

The bandits remembered them. Already some of the men were scrambling up the ravine, like two-legged ibex on the scree. One of the remaining bandits grabbed Leahy by his hair and hauled him out into the open.

Leahy met the kid's eye, then drove his elbow into the bandit's ribs. "Run!" he cried. "Go on, kid, run!"

In an instant, the boy was out of the mouth of the ravine, sprinting through the gunfire.

Leahy felt something strike his head, and then, in a semi-conscious stupor, he was being dragged up the ravine.

### III: EPILOGUE

The man sits in his room, puzzling over the story he has to write, wondering if it's even worth it. Would anybody really be interested in a skirmish between an

Indian army patrol and a group of bandits holding an unidentified western hostage?

It's the sort of thing you hear about all the time. What's the phrase he found the other day in the jumble of notes that filled every corner of this room he now considers his own? Like an "urban legend," that was it. The story that's told so often it takes on a life of its own.

Where is his evidence for this story? How can he prove it?

Even now, as he thinks about it, he begins to wonder just how much of it really took place. Is it possible that some kind of modern legend had somehow taken on a physical reality of its own for a time?

Legend given flesh by some act of collective will? Have the bandits and their victim – even as he ponders their fate – simply slid back into their netherworld, just as they had earlier emerged?

He smiles. It's a nice thought, but he can't bring himself to believe it. You can't just appear from nowhere and slide into the real world without someone noticing. It's just not possible.

**Keith Brooke** wrote "Resting Place" (IZ 128) and many earlier stories. Born in 1966, he was once regarded as a member of "the Interzone brat-pack" and had three hardcover sf novels published at a relatively early age – *Keepers of the Peace* (1990), *Expatria* and *Expatria Incorporated* (both 1991). Nowadays, he raises a family, holds down a full-time job, runs the on-line magazine *infinity-plus*, and still manages to find time to write short stories prolifically.

The publicity for Shelagh Stephenson's new play, *An Experiment with an Air Pump* (Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester), inspired by Joseph Wright's painting, hinted at a science-fiction theme but the play turned out to lean more towards horror. I wouldn't argue too hard either way.

Wright painted an experiment proving that life needs air. He shows an audience watching a pigeon struggling inside a glass globe as the pump does its cruel work. Playwright Stephenson exposes other vacuums that make life hard. She also shows that relieving such vacuums is equally cruel, if not permanent.

Two centuries separate the two linked stories, each set in the same house using the same actors. The action starts from a tableau of the painting, which thaws into the lively 18th-century Fenwick family and two scientist guests. The family's head, Joseph, played with gusto by David Horovitch, sees himself as a forward-thinking, enlightened, philosopher-scientist. As far as he is concerned, women have their poetry and literature.

1799, new century's eve: bodysnatchers keep busy and gentlemen scientists enjoy philosophical evenings dissecting corpses. They never question the provenance, for exciting discoveries lie at their fingertips. One such is Peter Roget, MD, still 20 but showing an unhealthy interest in listing, classifying and cross-referencing. Outside: North East England, political



## Millennial Eve(s)

Roy Gray

unrest, food riots. Inside: the debates of the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society.

Cut forward two centuries. Women are the scientists thrilled by discovery. Men are redundant English Literature lecturers, Horovitch role number two, or, like Tom Mannion's carpenter, Phil, credulous believers in aliens from UFOs. Restoration work reveals a body: 200 years buried but missing some bones.

1799: Tom Mannion plays the second physician, Thomas Armstrong, a ruthless heart-breaker in more ways than one. He woos a young Calvinist servant girl with a deformed back. Is it really love or does he merely want her for her hump? Pauline Lockhart brilliantly portrays the poor bewildered servant's shock at finding herself loved.

1999: Dearbhla Molloy plays a

geneticist worried that her work is leading to a bleak future where insurance company-mandated abortions will result from her foetal tests. She seeks her husband's advice. Is she selling her soul to pursue her science?

1799: The scientists have no doubts. Fenwick hails a wondrous future where scientific progress brings universal suffrage, democracy and no royalty. His despairing wife wants these republican ideals to start at home but she has stereotyped her daughter as a poet. This poet would rather cleave corpses with the physicians.

From a comic first act, events in 1799 darken steadily and laughter fades as the horror behind the hidden body unfolds. There are moments when dialogue doesn't quite ring true and references don't quite connect. These faults are few. (The script won the Peggy Ramsey Award.) The acting is excellent and Director Matthew Lloyd's production, hopping back and forth in time, works its magic until the cast freeze into the appropriate tableau for 1799's progression into 1800.

The atmosphere is redolent of *Interzone*: real historical characters placed within fiction, examination of the evolving place of women, darkly ambivalent views of science. You would enjoy it given the opportunity. Unfortunately Royal Exchange productions have only six weeks in the spotlight (this one finished March 1998.) But do go if it's revived, or toured.

Roy Gray

# Site-Seeing

## SF ON THE 'NET

### << FORWARD >>

You'd think science fiction and the Internet were made for each other: of all the various forms of literature, ours should be the one to embrace the new medium. To an extent, this is exactly what's happening, but there's still a long, long way to go...

Various pieces of research tell us that reading from the screen is so many per cent less effective – 30%, 40%, 50%, the precise figures vary. We all know statistics can be misleading and used to support weak arguments (as if I would), but what this one does mean is Reading From a Screen Gives You Headaches. Your eyes have to work too hard, you tend to skim-read and retain less. Books (and, of course, magazines) are lovely: they feel nice in the hand, they're easy on the eye, they're portable, they have a lovely graphical user interface with pages that load instantly.

So why publish on the 'net?

It's cheap, for a start, and anyone with access and a few basic computer skills can try their hand. It's flexible, too, allowing people to publish things they can't publish in conventional markets, at frequencies and scales that aren't dictated by the practicalities of printing and distribution. And it allows authors to retain complete control over their work (not necessarily an advantage, I'll concede).

All of this means, of course, that there's a hell of a lot of crap out there. Along with some good stuff. This article aims to nudge you towards some of the latter.

All of two years ago, in *Interzone* 106, Nick Gassman wrote a similar article to this.

Things move on, things change – particularly in a new medium like the 'net. One obvious change in that time is that the technology has improved, and with it the size of the audience and the sheer scale of the thing.

Another, perhaps more significant, change is that from the creative –

and amateur – chaos of the past, some kind of order is beginning to emerge. The pros have started to move in.

### << FICTION >>

Some of the big genre publishers have been established on-line for some time: Tor in the States and HarperCollins Voyager over here, for example. In recent months, though, it's become hard to find a publisher that doesn't have some kind of web presence. The latest additions range from Little, Brown's Orbit imprint to the smaller independent publisher, Tanjen.

Drop in to the average publisher's site and you'll find author interviews, book extracts, submission guidelines, maybe a competition or two. And, of course, the opportunity to order some books.

The magazines are all at it, too: with the recent addition of sites for *Asimov's* and *Analog*, all the major magazines (with the notable exception of *Science Fiction Age*) have web-sites. Most of these include sample stories and other extracts, guidelines, ordering details and more. *Interzone* doesn't have an official site, but it has at least three promotional pages set up by people involved with the magazine and also a complete on-line index recently launched by Greg Egan.

But there's more to science fiction on the 'net than just a handful of sites trying to flog books and magazines. The experiences of two professional print magazines, *Omni* and *Tomorrow*, tell us a lot about the realities of publishing sf on the 'net.

*Omni* was the first to make the move onto the 'net. A few years ago *Omni* regularly published some of the best short sf around and had cir-

culation figures that were the envy of just about everyone else in the business. But it wasn't enough: *Omni* was a big glossy magazine with high overheads and it just couldn't keep going. It transformed itself into a big, glossy web-site, and for a time it was the best source of science fiction on the 'net. According to Ellen Datlow, fiction editor for both incarnations of *Omni*, the most recent figures show that the site was getting "several hundred thousand 'eyes' a month." But even with the reduced overheads of electronic publishing, they couldn't keep going. As of April 1998, *Omni Online* has been cancelled.

The print version of *Tomorrow* was never as high profile as *Omni*, but both magazines followed a similar route into the digital world. Launched in the early '90s by Pulp-house and pretty quickly bought out by editor Algis Budrys, *Tomorrow* never managed to establish a high enough circulation to ride the storms of rising production costs. Never one to give up too easily, Algis moved the magazine onto the 'net. "The online *tomorrowsf* is bigger and brighter than the print *Tomorrow*," he says. From a print magazine that consisted almost entirely of fiction and black and white illustrations, the on-line version of *Tomorrow* has grown to include "a science column, a book review column, poems, cartoons, and a generally expanded base of features – including colour illustrations." The fiction is the same mix as before: a number of big name writers mixed in with a high proportion of new and newly established writers – "I don't have anything against publishing known writers," Budrys explains, "but it's an editor's first job to encourage new talent."

The first few issues of *tomorrowsf* were free, but recently modest subscription charges were introduced (although parts of the site are still free). Readership figures are up, compared to the print version. As Ken Jenks of *Mind's Eye Fiction* (see below) says, "That's the advantage of going global on the Web – even a

Keith Brooke

niche market has thousands of readers." It remains to be seen whether *tomorrow's* will last longer than its more glitzy predecessor.

The *Omni/tomorrow's* route is by no means the only one (although to date it's the one that has produced two of the most significant sources of sf on the 'net).

Some fiction magazines started out entirely on the 'net. No, that's not entirely accurate: a lot of fiction magazines started out entirely on the 'net. A lot of these only lasted one or two issues and published stories by the editor and assorted friends, neighbours and relatives. There are a lot of very worthy webzines out there, too: the on-line equivalent of the traditional small press, with the same patchy production and editorial values, and containing occasional gems amongst the very ordinary.

That's one of the problems with the 'net: it takes a lot of time to sort through the dross. That's one of the reasons why, when I set up *infinity plus* last year, I took a deliberately elitist approach: if someone stumbles across a new fiction site and sees a bunch of unfamiliar names, they're quite likely to assume the worst (I know I do); if they see names like Stephen Baxter, Terry Bisson and Lisa Goldstein, they might just stay awhile. (*Infinity plus* is the subject of an upcoming article, so I won't dwell on it here.)

One of the more interesting attempts to make sf work on the 'net is Ken Jenks' *Mind's Eye Fiction*. Less of a conventional magazine, *Mind's Eye* is a growing archive of short fiction, including republished stories from Larry Niven, Spider Robinson and Lawrence Watt-Evans, among others. Rather than charge a subscription for access to the site, Ken allows readers free access to the first half of every story. If you like the story enough to want to finish it you must either take part in an interactive advert or make a small electronic payment to see the rest. And because the costs of web-publishing are relatively low, the bulk of this money (75%) goes to the authors. *Mind's Eye* gets more than 30,000 "unique visitors" every month; of these, over 90% download a story; of these, a mere 2% pay for the ending (although 20% will sit through an ad to see the ending). *Mind's Eye* has had "a positive monthly cash flow" for over a year, and is now entirely in the black. A modest start, perhaps, but one that works and which may provide a model for future ventures.

Despite one or two limited success stories, on-line fiction still hasn't taken off. One of the biggest obstacles to successful web-publishing is funding: until webzines can pay professional rates and spend significant money on promotion then it's always going to be second best. As Ellen Dat-

## I find out what's happening far more quickly than if I wait to read it in a magazine.

low says, "A webzine with resources and talent and vision is all that's needed to make a splash." To date, those ingredients haven't been in place: *Omni* came closest, although clearly not close enough; others like *tomorrow's* and *Mind's Eye* have plenty of vision and talent, but even fewer resources.

### << HOME >>

The 'net means anyone who owns a computer and has at least a basic level of skills can become a publisher. As well as opening the field up to a lot of dross, this makes possible a lot of things not practical in conventional publishing. Most authors, for example, have a computer and some even know how to use it: an increasing number of authors have established, as James Patrick Kelly puts it, their own "little slice of c-space."

Authors have all kinds of reasons for setting up home pages. "I wanted to set up my own site because I like playing with the technology," Jim explains. "I liked the idea of giving readers easier access to me and I especially liked the notion of being my own publisher ... I regard it as a kind of literary R&D - I'm not sure exactly what results it is going to bring, but it's something that every writer ought to be thinking about."

Some authors' home pages are brash and commercial: "This is my new book, this is what the critics say - buy it!" Others are more wide-ranging (although they're still trying to sell books, of course). Typically, you'll find novel extracts, republished short fiction, advice to writers and commentary on the writing life, interviews, non-fiction, photos (of the author, the author's dog or, in Yvonne Navarro's case, the author's dog dressed up as Father Christmas...) and all manner of strange and inter-

esting items.

Molly Brown, for example, spent three years researching the historical background to her novel, *Invitation to a Funeral*. "I ended up with something like 400 pages of single-spaced typewritten notes on everything from conditions in the Stuart navy to 17th-century cures for baldness (anoint the head with the grease of a fox)," she says. "Once the book was published, it seemed a shame not to do something with all the 17th-century trivia I'd collected, so I thought it might be a fun idea to put some of my notes on the web in the form of an online tour of Restoration London. But maybe I've got a strange idea of fun." Molly's research notes are now being used as an online resource in a growing number of universities and schools around the world.

Geoff Ryman's *253* is another variation on the self-publishing on the 'net theme - an interactive novel written specifically for the 'net with, as the ad says, "No beginning ... No middle ... But there is an end." It is possible to work through *253* in a conventional linear manner, but you're pushing against the form if you try to do so: far better to shrug off the worry of missing something and just follow the links to jump between the 253 characters sharing a London Underground train. Recently published by Flamingo in a "print remix," *253* was described by *The Independent on Sunday* as "far too irritating to read cover to cover..." On the 'net it works beautifully: a case of an author fully in tune with the new medium.

### << DESTINATIONS >>

We're moving into areas exclusive to the 'net: the kind of thing you just can't do in print.

Canadian author Robert Sawyer's home page is a good example of this - the largest genre writer's home page in existence. Established in June 1995, the site contains over 350,000 words, 270 documents and 3,800 hypertext links. Why has he done things on such a large scale? "Why not?" he says. "My service provider gives me ten megabytes for my web site, and I had tons of material on my hard drive - interviews done with me by other writers; interviews I'd done with other writers; columns I'd written for various sf-related publications; articles I'd done about sf; handouts I use when teaching sf-writing course. It seemed silly not to package it all up and make it publicly accessible. The effort required to do so was negligible, the cost zero, and the returns have been enormous."

The returns Rob mentions include e-mail contact with fans, invitations for public speaking engagements and a number of foreign sales. Most recently, Rob received an invitation to be *USA Today Online's* Author of



the Month for July 1998. "This just fell into my lap," he explains. "The books editor of *USA Today Online* was surfing the web, looking for authors' sites that impressed her. I couldn't afford to buy the kind of exposure I'm going to get through *USA Today Online* (not to mention the additional promotion I'll get in the *USA Today* newspaper)."

Rob spends about a day a month working on his web-site (doing the coding by hand while he watches sitcoms) and he's also very active in the newsgroups and Compuserve's SF and Literature Forums. It's a significant investment of time, but clearly one that has paid off.

This kind of activity simply isn't possible in other media: Rob Sawyer and others are doing things you can't do anywhere else.

The potential of the 'net has been reflected in other, apparently conventional areas, too: *Omni* may have started out as a print magazine on the Web, but they soon started to exploit the possibilities of their new circumstances. Although Ellen Datlow was fiction editor for both versions, her role in *Omni Online* was very different. "I'm doing far more than reading and editing fiction," she said, shortly before *Omni*'s demise. "I'm producing online interview/chat shows, editing nonfiction, doing very low-level html [the mark-up language used to format web pages] so that I can put up links of my own, putting up reviews from the ongoing *Year's Best* reading, commissioning a four-author round robin every few months – I'm certainly not editing as much fiction as I'd like."

The diversity and enormous scale of the Internet make it a wonderful resource for writers – from up-to-date market information (and warnings about dubious publishers and agents) to story research and idle gossip.

"I tend to do research for almost everything I write," says Molly

Brown. "The web is a great place to find research materials without going out into the rain. I wrote a story about the 'millennium bomb' for a crime anthology, and found all the background information I needed on the web. I wrote a story based on *Coriolanus* for an anthology called *Shakespearean Whodunnits*, and once again I found everything I needed on the web. Not just the entire text of the play, but a translation of the original account by Plutarch on which the play was based, various sites about the lifestyles of ancient Romans, and even a copy of the constitution of the Roman Republic."

Readers, too, can spend hours finding out about their favourite writers (two good places to start are the Internet Speculative Fiction Database and the Science Fiction Resource Guide), or discovering new ones (go to the Alexandria Digital Literature Personalized Recreational Reading Recommender, tell it what you like to read and the virtual librarian will suggest other authors to try). There are even on-line conventions – the major disadvantage being the lack of a bar...

One of the biggest advantages I've noticed in my two or three years on the 'net is that I find out what's happening far more quickly than if I wait to read it in a magazine. Long-established conventional sources of sf news have acknowledged this – *Locus*, for example, has established a semi-independent web-based edition which, by its nature, is more up-to-date than its print companion. Other excellent sources of news and rumour include Dave Langford's *Ansible* (both web-site and e-mail versions are available) and Paula Guran's e-mail *DarkEcho Newsletter*.

If you really want to find out what's happening, you should spend some time in the newsgroups. These digital noticeboards where anyone can post a message are generally

unruly (and ungrammatical) places, prone to misinterpretation and argument, but they're also the venues for passionate and intelligent debate and are often the first place to break big genre news.

With all this digital activity, we have to ask whether on-line publishing will ever replace treeware like *Interzone*. Who knows? (I only write about the future, I don't predict it...) Most people active in the area see it as an added option rather than a direct replacement (although many, like Jim Kelly, think some form of web-based delivery system will eventually take over).

I think the last couple of years have shown that the 'net is a new medium in its own right – we do things differently there. As Algis Budrys says of 'net publishing: "No matter how you plan, it'll find a way to work out differently. And more than once."

The strengths of on-line publishing are in areas different to the strengths of the printed word. And the technology has a long way to go before most people would choose to read a story from screen rather than from the page.

Right now, my eyes are aching, my head hurts. I've been staring at a screen for too long...

#### << BACK >>

(My thanks to Molly Brown, Algis Budrys, Ellen Datlow, Ken Jenks, James Patrick Kelly and Robert Sawyer for their help in preparing this article.)

**Editor's Note:** Since the above was written Ellen Datlow, until recently the fiction editor of *Omni Online*, has e-mailed us to say: "My former colleagues and I have created a corporation called *Event Horizon Web Productions* and are planning on starting a very lean and mean fiction webzine this summer. More to come about that in a few weeks."

#### << BOOKMARKS >>

##### Webzines

*infinity plus*

<http://www.users.zetnet.co.uk/iplus/>

*Mind's Eye Fiction* <http://tale.com/>

*Omni* <http://www.omnimag.com/> (no longer updated, but the site will remain available for an unspecified time)

*tomorrowsf* <http://www.tomorrowsf.com/>

##### Home pages

Molly Brown <http://www.okima.com/>

James Patrick Kelly  
<http://www.nh.ultranet.com/~jimkelly/>

Yvonne Navarro  
<http://www.para-net.com/~ynavarro/>

Robert Sawyer <http://www.sfwriter.com/>

##### Misc

253 <http://www.ryman-novel.com/>

*Alexandria Digital Literature Personalized Recreational Reading Recommender*  
<http://www.alexlit.com/>

*Ansible*

<http://www.dcs.gla.ac.uk/SF-Archives/>  
*Ansible* or by e-mail: send a message to [Majordomo@imi.gla.ac.uk](mailto:Majordomo@imi.gla.ac.uk) containing the sole text: subscribe ansible

*DarkEcho* send an e-mail to [darkecho@aol.com](mailto:darkecho@aol.com) with SUBSCRIBE in the subject line

*Internet Speculative Fiction Database*  
<http://www.sfsite.com/isfdb>

*Locus Online* <http://www.locusmag.com/>  
*Science Fiction Resource Guide*  
<http://sflovers.rutgers.edu/VWeb/SFRG/sf-resource.guide.html>

##### Magazines and publishers

*Analog* <http://www.analogsf.com>

*Asimov's SF Magazine*  
<http://www.sfsite.com/asimovs/>

*HarperCollins Voyager*  
<http://www.harpercollins.co.uk/voyager/>

Greg Egan's *Interzone* index  
<http://www.netSPACE.net.au/~gregegan/IZ/index.htm>

*Orbit* <http://www.orbitbooks.co.uk/>

*Tanjen Books*  
<http://www.tanjen.demon.co.uk/>

*Tor* <http://www.tor.com/>

##### Newsgroups

[rec.arts.sf.announce](mailto:rec.arts.sf.announce)

[rec.arts.sf.composition](mailto:rec.arts.sf.composition)

[rec.arts.sf.written](mailto:rec.arts.sf.written)

[uk.media.books.sf](mailto:uk.media.books.sf)

# WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED IN Docklands

Ian Watson

*All of a sudden the daylight dimmed and the previously bustling marketplace was in deepest dusk. It took only a moment till the light level returned to normal. Yet in that moment and with scarcely a flicker the balance between the two races, indeed the whole aspect of the market, had changed utterly.*

*Now the chubby hairy jolly Forest Folk were fewer, and were quiet and subdued. The slim weaselly Allotes were in the majority. Allotes: al, as in “be a pal” and otes, as in “sow your oats.” Allotes, Allotes, rhymes with stoats, and looking like stoats or weasels up on their hind legs, dressed in trousers and striped waistcoats and jackets (and caps), a head and a half taller than the whiskery tubby little Forest Folk who mostly wore smocks or patchwork leather jerkins and hose. The insolent flat-capped spivs lounged everywhere, sinister and manipulative.*

*No outcries of shock or astonishment greeted the change, no appalled or delighted squeals. Some Allotes smirked slyly – did they have an inkling, or was that simply their regular demeanour? I could almost have sworn that nobody but myself was aware that the Allotes had taken over dominance. Life continued; only now the joy had drained away, replaced by an air of menace.*

*By the covenant the Forest Folk and the Allotes shared the lands, but those who until now had been the majority race were happy-go-lucky, far more interested in crafts than in craftiness. Before the daylight dimmed so abruptly, the marketplace had been leafy, woodland and town almost intermingling. Now only brick buildings surrounded the cobbled square where the Forest Folk seemed out of place even if their mushrooms and pies and tarts and trinkets were still worth having. I knew which race I preferred to predominate and I couldn't help fearing that in spite of the covenant affairs might now take a nasty turn. Yet what could I, a stranger, do? Hobnob with a hairy stall-holder – Do you realize what has happened, goodfellow? Appeal to an Allote – Did you do something to cause the alteration, and how? Was it wise, Sir? Will you honour the covenant?*

Instead, I awoke.

I generally dream richly, and I pay attention to my dreams. Over breakfast of toasted muffins and rasp-

berry jam I told my dark-haired daughter, “I dreamt a generic fantasy dream last night.”

Last day of October, today, Halloween – bright and clear though chilly outside. Sunlight flooded over Rochester Way, the dual carriageway into South-East London from Kent, tops of vans visible over the masking vegetation, the constant loud hum of glimpsed and unglimpsed traffic so regular that you scarcely noticed it. Sunlight illuminated Sarah's bonsai collection mounted on a table outside the picture window. The morning brightness made all the textiles and designs in the through-lounge utterly radiant as if the place were a painting by Bonnard. Sarah's speciality: flower motifs, much in demand by her agent's clients.

“The Allotes,” she repeated to herself.

“Yes, and now I've realized what their name means. It's from the Greek word *allos*, meaning ‘other.’”

“Trust you,” Sarah exclaimed, “to dream in Ancient Greek!”

“The word's used in science. In biology. Alleles, I think. Got a dictionary?”

Dictionary duly forthcoming, from a shelf crowded with encyclopedias of pattern and gardening books and poetry. I thumbed through.

“Here we are: *alleles*. Genes that can mutate into one another. Also, genes that produce different effects on the same set of developmental processes. And *allogamy* is cross-fertilization. My dream society had two alternative forms. Cuddly arty Forest Folk in the majority, all jolly and bright. Alternatively, the spiv-stoats in control, and not so nice a mood at all. Ethnic oppression.”

“Daddy, this is so weird.”

“Is it? It's a standard fantasy situation. Hobbits and Wild Wood, weasels capturing Toad Hall, blight upon the land, the Doom Lord's bane. That's what I meant by generic. The odd thing is me dreaming it so clearly. Has to be because of the fantasy convention.”

Which (check watch) I should be driving off to once I had made myself a salami and gerkin in muffin sandwich so as not to rely on the hotel for lunch.

“That isn't the weird thing,” Sarah said. “What's weird is what I dreamt. It's all come flooding back.”

In her dream she had been, she said, in some super-

science place. Borg technology crossed with Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*. Grimy futurism. On the outside of a huge sphere – contained within an even vaster sphere – were all these power-cylinders; and inside each cylinder an operator was chained. The operators bounced the cylinders up and down and to and fro like pogo-sticks. At the very top of the sphere: a kind of key-hole, a receptor. A woman suicide defector managed to fit her cylinder into that keyhole high up.

"If she abandons her cylinder this will detonate the whole sphere –"

"So what happened next?"

"That was all. It's the sort of dream *you* ought to have dreamed, not me. All the super-science stuff. Do you think we've had a dream-swap?"

A dream-swap... A sort of mental allogamy? What an odd notion. I preferred to think that attending a fantasy convention was responsible. I had already checked in at the convention the previous evening, Friday. During my sleep the spirit of fantasy, so to speak, had manifested itself.

I was not staying in the convention hotel, stuck out in the middle of nowhere in Docklands. Sarah and her partner Colin rented a house only twenty minutes drive from the place. I would save the high cost of a hotel room and see something of Sarah too, though not alas of Colin who was reluctantly spending the weekend visiting his family in Norfolk for a wedding. My wife Jean had dithered about coming to London, not to the convention itself but to have time with Sarah. However, now our daughter was going to have to spend the whole weekend painstakingly painting a duvet cover to meet a catalogue company's deadline. Literally painting a duvet cover. Printed in Turkey where costs were cheaper, the first strike-offs to arrive were wonky as regards the yellow, and yellow loomed large since the design was of daisies.

Panic! A photo team were due to take pictures of a room-set on the Monday. Miss the date, miss the catalogue. The absurd and only solution was for Sarah to amend the colours of a whole king-size duvet personally over the weekend, paint brush in one hand, hair-drier in the other, then send by taxi. She was going to be busy.

My main purpose in being at the fantasy convention was to meet a German friend, Heinz Hermes, who ran a thriving fantasy and science fiction games company in Düsseldorf. A few weeks previously Heinz told me in a phone call that the Swedish originators of a game called *Mutant Wars* were interested in commissioning novels set in their far-future universe of mutations and mayhem, which would have international distribution. Since I had already written several futuristic adventure novels associated with games I was the best candidate he could think of for what might be a fairly lucrative project.

Fur coat and no knickers, Docklands. Hyper-modern commercial buildings dominated by Canary Wharf Tower, fruit of the Eighties yuppie boom, and scarcely had I arrived in the hotel the previous evening than I was hearing, "One and a *quarter* hours to produce a bog-standard pizza! By the time it arrived I had to leave – I was due on a panel. I'm starving –"

"Have you heard about –?" And best-selling American fantasy writer Dawn Doone was mentioned as having her suite burgled. "Dawn was already pissed off at

the jacuzzi only having cold water –"

"Same as my shower –"

By contrast, some of the function rooms were furnaces; no way could windows be opened.

I headed upstairs to the foyer bar area to register. Scarcely had I done so and sat down with my bulging bag of goodies, or rubbish, depending on point of view – chunking third volume of some remaindered *Mage King* saga, et cetera – than the hotel tannoy announced, "Docklands Development Authority Police will commence removing vehicles from in front of the hotel in thirty minutes."

Oops. Seeing no restriction signs anywhere nor double yellow lines, I had left the car in the street along with several others.

Exit hastily. Steer the car into the narrow maw of the hotel's subterranean park, a tight concrete corkscrew burrowing deep, hideous to manoeuvre in unless you drove something less than six feet long, and costing, I had noted, a rapacious one pound per hour payable at the reception desk before your ticket would be doctored so that you could escape.

"*Facilis descensus Averno*," I quipped to a fellow victim who had managed to stable his vehicle without gouging the bodywork against jutting flanges or utility pipes. "They forgot to put that sign up top. Easy is the descent into hell but just you try to get out again."

The tall figure with salt and pepper crewcut, and wearing a lumberjack shirt, was Jim Kruger, redoubtable critic and encyclopedist.

"This car park," he replied with moral passion, "is an epitome of the whole social malaise of the Eighties." His sinewy purr, aroused, became a muscular throb. "It's a quintessence, even a paradigm, of the Thatcherite episteme."

Quite. Fur coat up above, no knickers down below.

Jim and I returned to the bar together.

"I'd better sort out my bag of rubbish," I said.

"What do you mean, *rubbish*? There are some very fine limited edition booklets in there."

"You'll let me toss out vol three of *Mage King*?" Quite a few copies were already lying discarded amidst empty beer glasses.

"Oh sure. Although even it, in its way, exemplifies the restorative shamanic function of fantasy."

"What, you've read it?"

Jim's eyes twinkled. He had read absolutely everything but I'm sure he was teasing.

Heinz was only coming on the Saturday. According to the programme book, following a panel in the Ballroom about the frustrated erotics of vampirism, wittily entitled *Love in Vein*, the first party of the evening was about to kick off in the Palace Lounge adjoining the Foyer Bar: the launch of a new fantasy imprint, Unicorn.

It turned out that Jim was due to say a few words preceding the champagne toast. Which he duly did.

Unicorn as symbol of purity, only a virgin can ride one (general chuckles and mock-reproachful blushy giggles from Francesca Philipps, senior editor in charge, wearing a flapper dress from the Twenties), healing powers of the unicorn's horn, fantasy archetypically treating of an evil sickness in the harmonious and eco-friendly realm and a quest involving suffering and self-

discovery leading to *palinorthosis*, Jim's word for Orl Korrekt Again. All Straight Once More.

I was fond of Jim and of his mighty vocabulary, so natural on his lips that it seemed an idiom which the majority of people would be derelict, nay morally deficient, not to employ so as to clarify their thinking, their writing, their reading, their very lives. He dignified the genre field. With my background in teaching literature in universities before I became a science-fictioneer (now hoping for a commission to develop *Mutant Wars*) I felt quite up to speed on Greek and Latin-based critical terminology, as indeed my dream demonstrated to Sarah; and probably I did dream about *Allotes* rather than about "Other-Folk" on account of Jim's words at the party. The theme of my dream must have been spurred by him, although no *palinorthosis* occurred in the dream; I woke too soon for that.

*Tendrils* was the title of Jim's recent collection of review-essays which was short-listed for the award-giving on the Sunday in the non-fiction category. (I certainly voted for it.) The word capsuled the way in which a work of fantasy coils itself around the core-stem of the genre, supporting itself connectedly as it put forth its own particular garb of leaves and blooms, of pages, characters, and action. Since there were ten magisterial essays in Jim's book, it also consisted of that number of *drills* into the subsoil and bedrock of fantasy, as it were. Ten drills. Even mental exercises!

Jim and I shared various odd tendrils of affiliation. Living deep in the countryside as I did (whilst writing about mighty machines and interstellar empires) I was not part of the metropolitan circuit of writers constantly meeting one another at book launches, prize-givings, promotions, and such. At least from my village on many nights I could admire the Milky Way, a view denied to city dwellers by light-fog. Jim's wife was an artist and part-time London walking-tour guide. In my village lived a tour-guide who knew Jim's wife through the trade, and whom I knew in turn because... but this complicates. Suffice it to say there are assorted tendrils.

Anyway, after Francesca Philipps had delivered an upbeat spiel about Unicorn, I circulated. Talk was still of the Hotel from Hell. Of Dawn Doone's burglary, obviously an inside-job. Of cold showers, and denials that any other restaurants were open in Docklands, whereas one or two certainly were. Of how the hotel hadn't even intended to warn guests by tannoy of the impending tow-away and impoundment of vehicles except that organizer Yvonne blew her top and insisted.

As champagne flowed, the conviviality and companionship characteristic of a convention asserted itself vastly over the downsides.

Two Finnish friends had brought me a jar of home-made cloudberry jam, the berries picked by themselves in their local bog at the cost of wet feet. Leena and Juhani had brought a second jar for Andrew Oakley, "He of the Trees," who had been their guest at a convention in Finland the previous year (as I had been three years earlier) and who was to be Master of Ceremonies at the banquet and awards-giving on the Sunday. Soon the four of us were deep in converse, Andrew rhapsodizing about the spirit of the forests. From Andrew I suppose I took the Forest Folk of my dream. A handsome fellow he is: tall, curly dark hair, puckish

smile, and the kindest of people, though with a dark violent streak in his work.

Afterwards I nattered with – but this isn't the point.

Drizzle is falling as I arrive at the overblown though defective hotel this Saturday morning. Fine weather at Sarah's, rather foul over here to the north of the river. The parking restrictions and threats of tow-away I must ascribe to the IRA bomb which blew up part of Docklands a while ago as a symbol of oppression, causing millions of pounds worth of damage – yet not a notice in sight anywhere on the approach, no police cones on the street, nothing to warn the unwary. Directly outside the hotel a police car stands unoccupied. Enquiries proceeding into Dawn Doone's burglary, no doubt.

After inserting my own car into its troglodytic concrete bunker, I head inside. Even before reaching the bottom of the grand staircase I'm swept up in talk. Adage for conventions: allow at least twenty minutes to get from one spot to another. Gill has come over from Ireland, and I haven't seen Jeremy Avril-Jones for ages. While chatting with them I glimpse two policemen departing through the main doors. A brief sighting, mind you, but their bearing and their peaked caps remind me oddly of my dream. Must be the contrast with all the fantasy people ambling and lounging around.

Finally I do reach the foyer bar to find Heinz ensconced with a couple of other Germans. Heinz is a burly fellow with short whitening hair, short whitening beard, and a seemingly permanent good-humoured grin. His two companions are fantasy artists with work in the art show, off to which they soon head, leaving Heinz and myself to discuss *Mutant Wars* – but this is not really relevant. What is relevant is that one of the barmen of whom I keep catching a glimpse through the shifting crowd is a dark shifty type with a weaselly face who could almost have stepped out of the market place of my dream. A sort of human Allote. He's probably North African or Portuguese from Madeira, as many of the hotel staff seem to be, and I'm being ridiculously prejudiced.

We'll skip my discussions with Heinz. Andrew Oakley stops by, prior to giving a talk about fantasy forests, and confesses to feeling very nervous even though he doesn't look remotely so. I go along to lend support, not that he needs it, nor extra audience either. He carries the occasion off with aplomb.

At noon there's a party hosted by Microsoft – house red plonk – followed, if one cares, by more house red paid for by Peregrine Books; but I nurse a half of lager in the bar and munch my delicious stuffed cold muffin in company with Gill and Jeremy and others before spending an hour browsing in the book room, chatting to dealers and friends and my French publisher and some Ukrainians.

Three o'clock: and in the art-deco cocktail bar downstairs a new magazine, *Phantasia*, launches itself innovatively with scones and clotted cream, squashy cream cakes, and pots of tea. This proves to be a complete wow, most people by now being bored with free booze. The packed room is soon as hot as a cup of tea, so I and many others overspill into the reception area. From his vantage point behind the check-in counter, slyly studying us –

– and that sleek skinny woman perching at a computer terminal along from him –



– and that slim slick porter on the far side of the entrance – all now staring at *me* in unison as I balance my cup and saucer – they're in human guise, but I know them. As I hurry back into the happy perspiring throng in the cocktail bar, the Tiffany-style lights all flicker.

There are many more of us than of *them*, and the hotel has signed a binding contract with the convention, good heavens; but that flicker of the lights increasingly worries me. It's easy to imagine that behind the wainscots of the hotel, behind the de luxe panelling and the wallpaper, are narrow hidden corridors. Where is the machinery controlling the heating and air conditioning, and the lighting? Above all, the *lighting*, which might fade then resurge to reveal a terrible change.

By the evening, and the Fantasy Writers Association Punch Party, nothing has worsened. Since I shall soon be driving back to Sarah's I only drink plain orange juice; so alcohol is not responsible for my heightened sense of what Jim Kruger characterizes in *Tendrils* as an *asthenic* situation, from a Greek word for sickness.

On the contrary, it is lack of alcohol in my bloodstream and brain that inhibits me from buttonholing people to alert them to the situation – which will come to a head, I'm now convinced, not tonight but early tomorrow afternoon. Where else but at the Fantasy Awards Banquet when almost everyone will be gathered together in one place, in the Grand Suite behind closed doors?

Meanwhile hotel staff who are actually Allotes eye me askance as if they sense that I know. Temporary escape from the hotel is uppermost in my mind.

When I descend to the underground car park, after handing over eleven quid to that sleek slinky female to have my exit ticket processed, I'm followed – click click of feet, echoing in the coiling concrete tunnel with its tight-packed bays. My car has gone – no, a van hides it. The electronic key won't work – second time it does, doors all clunk open. Inside, and centrally lock.

My pursuer is the same female. She stares brazenly – not at all nervous to be trailing a bloke into this empty desolate place.

Backing out and turning is a nightmare with that van alongside. Back and forth, back and forth like a piston. I'm going to get jammed. Don't scrape the bodywork. A male Allote has joined the female. Both watch my pathetic manoeuvres superciliously. At last I'm able to drive past them. Window down quickly to thrust the ticket into the box at the barrier; and I'm out on an empty street.

When I drove in this morning, using Rochester Way, of course I went under the river by way of the Blackwall Tunnel. But now the southbound tunnel is closed. Signs block the roadway: maintenance, supposedly. I spy Allotes beside the signs – the *asthenia* is worse than I feared; it has spread throughout Docklands.

No choice but to stay north of the river all the way to Dartford Bridge then double back.

Turns out to be a hell-drive. Miles of traffic cones mutate a straight road into an interminable chicane, and mists are rising, drifting grey blankets blindingly a-dazzle from my dipped headlights. This is the old Dickensian marshland where boatmen used to fish for corpses,

and in the mists I seem to glimpse spectral Allote figures emerging from hiding then vanishing again.

I'm experiencing a hideous epiphany – or should I say an anti-epiphany? An epiphany is a glorious showing-forth, a revelation emerging amidst the mundane, a word beloved of James Joyce in his *Portrait of the Artist*. Jim Kruger should know the proper term for an anti-epiphany.

My relief at reaching the Dartford Bridge is enormous, as is the bridge itself, rising upward and upward, many lanes wide, high above a myriad lights and the dark river like a giant ramp for launching a space vehicle as in the film *When Worlds Collide*. When I dip down, the south side is clear of mist. All is visible and orderly, no longer mutating.

I shall be safe at Sarah's overnight. Very safe in the mundane sense: her neighbourhood is full of retired bullion robbers who keep a tight rein on their patch, resulting in one of the lowest insurance premiums for house contents, cheaper than my own premium in the supposedly placid heart of the countryside.

How Sarah and Colin come to be living there, in an externally tatty house amidst others tarted up as Spanish villas with XJ6s on the forecourts, is a complicated story involving Colin's Godmother, the cook at a nursing home, and the cook's father marrying an air hostess. This sounds like the title of a Peter Greenaway film...

Safe in the mundane sense, yes. But also metaphysically. Asthenia has not yet spread south of the river.

When I arrive, Sarah has retired to bed leaving a note. Zonked out by the duvet covet – which is much in evidence, big daisies all over it. Some sea-food tagliatelle in the fridge if I need some supper.

Ah, I have been in the present tense for immediacy.

Sleep, wake. It was Sunday morning. After I told Sarah what had happened, she asked, "How much did you drink yesterday?"

"Don't be silly, I was driving."

"Had you considered you might be hallucinating?"

"I most certainly was *not*. Look, I seriously need you to come to the convention with me today for back-up. You dreamt the other portion of my dream – the world that the Allotes will make if they're in control. I'll pay for a day membership and I'll try to get a banquet ticket for you."

"Aren't you rather forgetting about my duvet?"

"How much is left to finish?"

"There's two or three hours more work yet."

"Bring the blessed thing with you! And the paint and hair-drier. People do embroidery at conventions." Not at this one, actually. "*Please*, Sarah. There's oodles of space. No one will walk on it. It'll be like part of the art show."

"A daisy duvet? I hardly think so."

"I beg you."

Fast forward to the foyer bar once more. Spread out, a king-size duvet cover *is* rather large; but never mind. Ideally Sarah should have used fabric paint. This being a rush job, she was dry-brushing brilliant concentrated water colour to avoid oozing, dragging the yellow on with a half-inch brush. Of course she needed to bring cardboard to avoid soak-through, a duvet cover being basically a big bag.

Andrew Oakley seemed very taken by the design and sat beside me to admire Sarah down on her hands and knees, him in a dinner jacket and frilly shirt in readiness for the banquet – which in fact would be dress-as-you-please. Jim Kruger hove to, looking butch and severe in a stylish black shirt cut off at the shoulders, displaying muscular arms to advantage. His more minimalist outfit connoted moral thrust – inquisitor at work in a lit-crit dungeon – and that's exactly what would be needed.

No time like the present.

I had feared it would be hard to persuade Jim and Andrew. However, as I related my dream and Sarah's and my subsequent observations, not only inside the hotel but also while driving, Jim's demeanour altered quickly to full alert. And He of the Trees, too. Jim's critical antennae and Andrew's rootier instincts had in fact been bristling for some while, and now they perceived as I did.

"Something awful's going to happen at the banquet," I predicted.

Jim nodded. "Aside from the standard of the food, you mean. The Dimming, and the Change. Allotes!" He flexed his hands. "Now that we know their true name, thanks to you, we're empowered."

"We need to bring about pre-emptive *palinorthosis*. Or else the Change will reach out across London. Few people will realize but we'll be on course for the future that Sarah dreamt. The spheres and the cylinders."

From the floor my daughter chipped in.

"My dream might have been a version of the Millennium Dome going up in Greenwich."

"Maybe, maybe not," said Jim. "Maybe much worse."

Andrew seemed at a loss. "Palin-what?"

"*-orthosis*. Restoration. Andrew, you're in charge of the proceedings today. You're the wielder of words. Ian's right. It'll happen at the banquet for sure. Wait here!" So saying, Jim leapt up and headed for the Dealer's Room.

Speedily he returned with a borrowed copy of his mammoth *Encyclopedia Fantastica*, weighing in at several pounds and well over a thousand pages. He riffled through to the entry on *Asthenia*, sickness in the land, which he summarized quickly for Andrew, and next he turned to the cross-referenced entry on *Palinorthosis*, coaching Andrew in these potent critical terms.

It was then that it happened. The lights flickered. I hadn't noticed people drifting away, but the foyer bar was deserted apart from the three of us, and Sarah doggedly painting, and a pair of wily-looking barmen.

A very *allotic*-looking hotel security man came from a side corridor. In his polished leather shoes he strolled across the far reach of Sarah's duvet and scowled at a yellow footprint he impressed on the carpet.

"Bundle this up and get it out of here," he snapped, teeth predatory. "Right now!"

One of the barmen had sidled from behind the long counter, holding a bottle of Newcastle Brown Ale by the neck in a menacing manner. His companion joined him, clutching an empty pint mug, the heavy dimple sort, and a towel. The temperature had chilled.

As the security Allote bent over to paw the duvet cover, Andrew bellowed, "Leave that alone!" Face thunderous, he yanked at the fabric, rising as he did so to

his full six feet, swirling the daisy duvet cover up and around himself so that it settled upon him like a cloak.

Reaching out instinctively in this artificial place for something natural to draw strength from, Andrew's fingers settled upon the polished oak dowelling fronting the counter, held in place by brass ring-clamps. His hand closed on the oak – and he wrenched a yard-long section free.

A staff, to use against the Allote staff. In that moment, as he confronted the security creature, Andrew *was* a Mage King. And I swear, I swear that green buds burst from the oak.

Jim also rose, hefting the *Encyclopedia Fantastica* like Moses on Mount Sinai. The two barmen were advancing upon Andrew whose back was turned to them. I thought that Jim might bellow a powerful critical term at the barmen; but instead, with condign righteousness (and considerable force) – just as they say of an American district attorney – *he threw the book at them*. All those million and more words all at once.

The effect upon the two Allotes was staggering. Quite literally: struck and stunned, the barman holding the bottle cannoned into his crony, skulls cracking together. Both of them sprawled.

As if participating in the shock, the lights flickered again – and then from the grand stairway and from the direction of the lifts and from the art show carefree conventioners were returning, chatting and chuckling, to the foyer bar – to catch a puzzling glimpse of what must have seemed a piece of impromptu vaudeville, Andrew cloaked in bright daisies tossing his staff at the security man as Jim, very concisely, cried, "Split!" and as the four of us scarpered, Andrew bringing Sarah's duvet cover with him, though she must abandon her paint and cardboard. Yet we knew full well that *palinorthosis* had occurred, that the Change had been aborted, that the Allotes were trounced.

There were some unfortunate repercussions.

During the banquet, which was quite meagre – the hotel cooks not having had time to lay on a proper propitiatory feast of, say, suckling pig in place of the scheduled breast of chicken with carrots, spuds, and broccoli – Jim was escorted out of the Grand Suite by police.

Officers had by no means turned up immediately, and in any case the hotel's security man had no way of identifying Jim – or Andrew – until the banquet began. To him, they were nobody special. The arresting officers were the same pair whom I had seen leaving the hotel the day before, although they no longer looked in the least *allotic*.

In fact four policemen turned up. After urgent intercession by Yvonne the other two contented themselves with keeping an eye on Andrew while he discharged his duties as MC, which he carried out nobly in the circumstances. Scarcely anyone had the least idea what, if anything, had happened – though Andrew looked bruised about the eye as if he had taken a punch. The yellow discolouration was actually paint from Sarah's duvet cover. She had sponged Andrew's dinner jacket but in poor light we had missed the stain on his face.

Sarah and I were sharing a table with Gill and anthologist Pete and Nicky and several others. Before we sat down, Pete had been nattering about Lord Dun-

sany. Now he was agog with curiosity. Since I knew Pete well, I tried to confide about the Allotes, only to be greeted by cordial scepticism. Sarah frowned at me, implying that I should keep my trap shut.

When eventually Dawn Doone opened an envelope to announce that Jim had won (in absentia) for *Tendrils*, there arose a great cheer of solidarity since obviously Jim was in some kind of trouble – and Yvonne accepted the statuette on his behalf.

Once the awards were over, the two officers made their way forward to arrest Andrew too, for criminal damage, so it transpired. Jim's charge, more serious, would be assault. Myself and Sarah appeared merely to have been blameless spectators of the affray. Obviously we had chased after Andrew to retrieve the duvet cover.

And in fact Sarah and I had to leave promptly, with no chance to attend the post-awards party sponsored by Paragon Books. That duvet cover needed several hours remedial attention.

Lo, the southbound Blackwall Tunnel was open to traffic.

In the aftermath Dawn Doone's jewels and credit cards and AmEx travellers cheques turned up, stashed under pebbles in the pot of a plastic palm tree on the floor below her suite.

Andrew was ordered to pay the cost of repairs to the bar-rail. In lieu of a fine he was sentenced to 30 hours community service on an urban woodland project – which suited him down to the ground and inspired his splendid novella, "Woodmaster."

At Jim's court appearance, where he conducted his own defence, the police prosecuting officer preposterously and allotically tried to portray Jim as a skinhead committing a racist attack. The two barmen had in fact been Moroccans, and I have mentioned how Jim was clad and looked at the time of the incident. Needless to say, the truth about Allotes would scarcely have endeared Jim to the magistrates on the bench. According to the report in the newszine *Slightly Slower Than Light* "with cultured eloquence" Jim easily rebutted the accusation, counter-accusing that contrariwise it was the hotel management and personnel who had discriminated against guests. In exasperation he had

merely thrown a book. Was it his fault that the only book at hand was so heavy as to cause concussion?

Upshot: a £50 fine. (Actually, Jim's action cost him twice that sum since the copy Jim had borrowed split its spine falling to the floor after felling the Allotes, and he must reimburse the dealer.) No mention in *SSTL* about how Jim and Andrew and Sarah and I had saved the world.

That's pretty much it, except for an odd addendum.

A couple of weeks ago the Krugers' rooftop patio featured on TV in one of those programmes where experts provide a makeover. Until now the walk-onto roof had been a bare blank space overlooking a street market – Jim's DIY activities had focused less on urban gardening than on fitting out several lock-up garages in his neighbourhood which he rented to store the vast over-spill from his book collection.

When the presiding expert was finished, lo, a varnished boardwalk bore tubs of herbs, light-weight plastic garden furniture, and a big terracotta-look plastic urn, into which first of all went a lot of polystyrene pieces – keeping the weight down was essential on a roof – and then a sapling along with soil and some fertilizer.

A guest joined the Krugers to toast their aerial garden, none other than Andrew Oakley. Evidently Andrew and Jim had become close since events at the hotel.

Jim raised a glass of white wine. "To our first tree," he said drolly.

He of the Trees poured some wine as a libation and set his glass down upon the soil in the urn. Ceremoniously he gripped the sapling in both hands, blessing it, anointing it with his palms.

Though I could not make out the species, how could I ever forget that length of oak dowel budding in Andrew's grasp? I fear for the structural integrity of that roof in months to come.

---

**Ian Watson's** last story in *Interzone* was the novella "Secrets" (issue 124), which currently he is extending into a full-length novel. He lives in Northamptonshire, he has a daughter, and although he attended last year's real-life World Fantasy Convention in London's Docklands, he would no doubt wish us to insist that all the characters and situations in the above story are entirely imaginary and bear no relation to any living... etc. etc.

---

Ian R MacLeod

Stephen Baxter

**fiction**

Molly Brown

Ian McDonald

Keith Brooke

**insight**

David Langford

<http://www.users.zetnet.co.uk/iplus>

**infinity plus**

Nicholas Royle

Eric Brown

**critique**

Jonathan Wylie



## Big Science Meets the Pagans in the Disco at the End of the Millennium

Paul J. McAuley

Although rather more scientists have written sf novels than ghosts have written ghost stories, there's a surprising lack of realistic portrayals of the practice and culture of science in sf, and there are still all too many depictions of scientists as misunderstood geniuses, hopeless geeks, monomaniacal lunatics or individualistic entrepreneurs – caricatures of Edison, Einstein or Fu Manchu. One exception is Gregory Benford's *Timescape* (1980), one of the best fictionalized accounts of the research process (I can think of only two other contemporary novels which rival it, Greg Bear's *Blood Music*, at least in its opening chapters, and John Updike's *Roger's Version*). In his latest novel, *Cosm* (Avon/Eos, \$23; Orbit, £9.99), Benford, a research physicist as well as an sf writer, provides not only a critical exposition of the culture and politics of Big Science, but also the life and death of a whole universe, wrapped up in a neat technothriller package.

An experimental run on a super-collider at Brookhaven, for which Alicia Butterworth, a young African-American physics professor, has fought against administrative obstruction and environmental protestors, goes wrong. It wrecks Alicia's detectors and leaves behind a mysterious, seemingly impenetrable mirrorball of unknown composition. Alicia spirits it out of Brookhaven and returns with it to her laboratory at the University of Irvine in California. With the help of her research assistants and a theoretical physicist, Max Jalon, she realizes that the object, which she dubs *Cosm*, is a wormhole into a newly created universe where time is running faster than ours at an exponentially increasing rate, giving her the

chance to study its entire evolutionary sequence. The announcement of her discovery entangles her with religious fanatics, scientific politics (Brookhaven wants *Cosm* returned as it was created on their equipment), and the government.

Benford's depiction of the culture of science, from the microclimate of a university department to big government projects, and its intersection with society at large, is handled with acerbic insight. The evolution of *Cosm*'s universe provides not only a framework for a thrilling exegesis of how science is performed at the sharp end, but also provides the motor for the plot; as *Cosm*'s universe evolves towards its end, it threatens to release disastrous amounts of energy. And despite the technothriller framework, Benford's characters are not stereotypes; his

scientists are, quite rightly, for this is the central paradox of the scientific culture, fallible humans who can't help trailing their personal lives into their research. However, it's a little puzzling why he should choose a single African-American woman as his main character, for Alicia seems as uncomfortable inhabiting her skin as one suspects Benford might have been: she not only dislikes her body, but also the cultural baggage of being black, and rejects black suitors in favour of (white) Max Jalon. As a result, the scenes in which Alicia attempts to continue a personal life amidst the chaos of media interest about her research are less believable than those in the laboratory, where she doesn't have to keep apologizing to herself. Further, Benford tends to load his arguments either by presenting those impeding Alicia as ignorant nuts (Benford clearly has little time for the environmental movement) or by handicapping them with uncool impediments – a badly-fitting wig or an appalling taste in clothes.

Nevertheless, *Cosm* succeeds admirably not only in presenting scientists as driven but thoroughly human characters, but also in capturing, with scrupulous verisimilitude, the thrill of the chase after scientific truth. Benford has famously said that sf written without adhering to what is known is like playing tennis with the net down; here, it's strung taut, and the game is good.

Robert Sawyer's *Illegal Alien* (Ace, \$21.95; Voyager, £5.99) is aimed at those who read nothing but sf. It was first published in *Analog*, and like many of *Analog*'s stories is structured around a courtroom drama, where what would normally be vices (rhetoric prized over ideas; opinions, exploding like overheated light bulbs, over knowledge) are regarded as virtues.

Aliens arrive in orbit around Earth, but their spaceship is damaged and needs repair (it hit something in the Kuiper Belt, less likely than winning the Lottery ten times in a row even if it had been travelling in the plane of the Solar System, which it could not have been, since it originated from Alpha Centauri, which is *beneath* the plane of the Solar System; while Sawyer's fiction masquerades as hard sf, it surely lacks the necessary rigour). While they are waiting for human technology to be brought up to speed to manufacture replacement parts, one of the aliens is arrested for murder after the body of a TV astronomer accompanying them is found mutilated in their quarters in California. In the resulting trial, White House official Frank Nobilio enlists the help of a magisterial and autodidactic





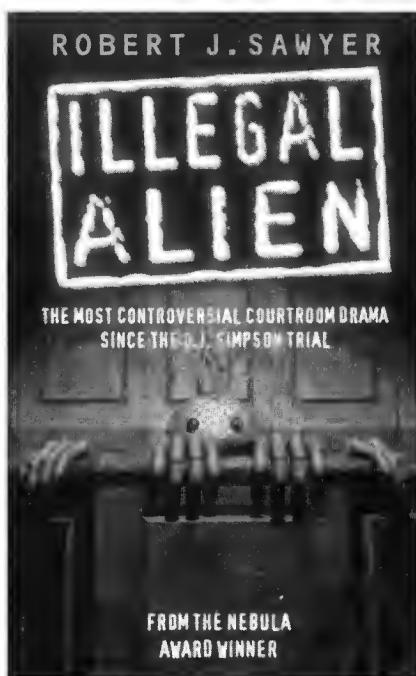
lawyer to defend the alien and avoid an interstellar war.

It's a bland, thinly-imagined tale populated entirely by caricatures, shamelessly deploying unreconstituted sf clichés, and littered with self-regarding references to other sf. As a result, Sawyer's attempts at satire fall woefully short of their easy targets, and although there's a neat twist in the tail of the plot, turning on the aliens' real intentions, even that rapidly turns into the kind of bully triumphalism so beloved of hardcore American sf. Apart from references to O. J. Simpson and CNN, this could have been written any time in the last 40 years. Apart from fans of this kind of stuff, who cares?

A girl, a gun, a luxury car and a boy on the run from patricide: we're in Calderland again. Like its predecessors, *Cythera* (St Martin's Press, \$23.95; Orbit £5.99), Richard Calder's fourth novel, is an hallucinatory rush through decimated landscapes dense with allusions to 20th-century popular culture, thorny, confrontational, and compelling.

In the First World of the *de luxe*, The Censors have taken control of the media to protect children from their own criminal tendencies. The Third World is littered with the leavings of the First, and the remnants of a failed children's crusade which unsuccessfully attempted to crash the borders of the First inhabit abandoned camps in the mining territories of Antarctica, where Zane Weary (one of many pseudonyms) is on the run with Dahlia Chan. Dahlia is a ghostgirl based on the star of schlock movies such as *The Kingdom of Childhood* and *Kung-Fu Nymphet From Hell*, an eidolon enflashed by unstable nanotechnology, having escaped from the fibresphere's simulated Earth2 through The Wound, "that locus in space-time where information becomes live," which The Censors want to destroy. At age nine, Zane has killed his father, and now, after 15 years in prison, is stalked by the manifestation of his electronic stepfather, former protector from corrupting media images in childhood and his now relentless persecutor. Zane and Dahlia are searching for a way to fabled Cythera, the unification of Earth1 (reality) and Earth2 (virtual reality) and find instead death and transformation.

The narration shifts to Thailand and the point of view of Mosquito, the transvestite thief familiar from Calder's previous fictions, who falls in with Dahlia and Zane, now reincarnated as leaders of The Army of Revolutionary Flesh, which wants to conquer Europe and strip Earth to build a vast spaceship, for the search for Cythera has now shifted to the stars. After they steal a nuclear submarine, the third and final part



shifts to the viewpoint of Michael Flynn, a film producer imprisoned by The Censors in one of his own film sets on the Greek Island of Kithira because of his paedophilic predilections and his subversive movies, such as *The Kingdom of Childhood*. Believing that he is a Cytherian prince on a prison planet within a vast computer simulation run by aliens, Flynn is set free by the Army of Revolutionary Flesh, witnesses a fusion between his wife, the actress who once played Dahlia, and Dahlia's eidolon, and tries to reconcile his delusions with the aims of the Army, whose beliefs are built on his old screenplays, which in turn were inspired by his delusions.

The narrative is dense, hectic and



rebarbative ("men who liked a capital F in *Fairyland* as much as they liked it in *Fuck*" – what can he mean, dear reader?), an intense deconstruction not only of the powerful signifiers of the mediascape, but also of its own narrative. Each section is both a criticism and a heightening of its predecessor; Zane and Dahlia's dreams of a utopian unification of reality and mediascape may be derived from Flynn's deranged fictions, but they are strong enough to change the world. The landscapes are realized with a vivid and dense lyricism; the characters' dialogues are wry, tough and edgy; it is truculent, obsessive, and possessed by a fierce and restless intelligence. If there's a flaw, it is that there's an abiding sense that *Cythera* borrows too strongly from Calder's previous novels; it is not always generous to its reader, unless that reader is Richard Calder. Read it because it promises to be one of the best sf novels of this year, and wonder where Calder will go next, and hope that he might voyage outward, rather than further inward.

Over in California, Alexander Beshers's *Mir* (Orbit, £9.99), a sequel to his first novel, *Rim* (presumably the titles of the other books in the projected series will be unpronounceable) taps into the ethos of Silicon Valley, where computer mavens cloak libertarian economic attitudes with 1960s counterculture jargon. It's a picaresque thriller which blends a kaleidoscopic welter of ideas, few fully baked, with hippy psychobabble, cod Eastern mysticism and '60s cultural tropes, resulting in a weird technopagan blend that seems to have been dictated by the ghost of Timothy Leary into a voicewriter capable of producing only electronic manuals.

The story, only intermittently visible, is that of a brand of sentient tattoo derived from an alien virus (echoing Neal Stephenson's echo of William Burroughs) which first appeared in *Mir*, the Russian space station, and now threatens to take over the world. When it manifests itself on the girlfriend of Trevor Gobi, son of *Rim*'s VR investigator Frank Gobi, Trevor travels through the electronic counterculture to seek a cure, and after a series of adventures discovers the truth about life, the Universe and everything.

Well, maybe. Unlike Paul Di Filippo, who operates in a similar area, one suspects Beshers isn't all that interested in actual science or any cultural artefact later than *The White Album*. Though nominally set in the 2030s, *Mir*'s iconography is entirely of our time. Everyone talks in '60s argot, man; Trevor is as hip to the *I Ching* as, say, William Kotzwinkle's (1974) Fan Man; all brand names



(and car models) are familiar. Nevertheless, Beshers's manic energy and well-tuned sense of the ridiculous propels *Mir's* hectic satire like a ball bearing through an antic pinball machine, and the crossbreeding of virus and tattoo as information carrier is original and provokingly explored. Don't expect to make much sense of it, but if you relax there's a lot of fun to be had from the ride.

Richard Grant's *In the Land of Winter* (Avon, \$24) is of a straightforward – mainstream, even – school of fantasy to which writers such as James Blaylock and Peter Straub belong, in which the quotidian world is subtly heightened and geyed, and the real magic is not in spells but in the enchantment of the revealed richness of the world.

Pippa Rede is a true witch, a pagan who is amused by "incense and strawberry" wiccans who have chosen witchcraft as a lifestyle rather than a way of life. She's also a single mother, living with her unsympathetic aunt in a small Vermont town and working as a shop assistant. Just before Christmas, an injudicious interview with the local newspaper starts a literal witchhunt. Pippa loses her job and worse, custody of her beloved (albeit winsomely named) nine-year-old daughter Winterberry because of a crusade by the loathsome Allison Rhinum, a self-proclaimed therapist specializing in "abuse and recovery issues," in league with an ineffectual social-services bureaucrat and the newspaper's proprietor.

Hounded out of town, Pippa finds unexpected and not always helpful allies in Arthur Torvid, an ex-hippy lawyer of low standing, Glyph, a representative of Californian Witches Against Negativity and Discrimination, and Judith, a "lifestyle" witch, and friendship from the eccentric Mrs Mallard (whose wolf friend provides the only touch of explicit fantasy in the narrative) and a sympathetic native American. Gradually, Pippa loses her helplessness and uncertainty and finds, through her own ceremonies, the power within herself to rally her unlikely band and confront her enemies.

Grant is particularly good at the claustrophobic sanctimony – ironically heightened by Christmas sentiment – which drives the townspeople to conspire against Pippa, and the stifling malignancy of shapeless bureaucracies whose members wield power and deploy unproven and unprovable pseudo-psychiatric methodologies not for the public good but to satisfy their own prejudices about what is normal. *In the Land of Winter* is affecting, carefully paced and artfully restrained, sometimes skirting preciousness (especially with the sub-J. P. Donleavy "poetic" tail-

pieces which end each chapter) yet, like its heroine, with a strong moral core and a sharp-edged and honest intelligence.

Are you ready for the end of the Millennium? If you haven't booked your cruise or hotel room, you're almost certainly too late. Its mausoleum is being erected at Greenwich; its first obituary has appeared, edited by Sarah Champion, in the form of a collection of stories, *Disco 2000* (Serpent's Tail, £6.99), set on the last night of 1999. Of names *Interzone* readers might recognize, Pat Cadigan's "Witnessing the Millennium" is an edgy and effective tale of urban paranoia in the urban wastes of outer North London; Paul Di Filippo's "Mama Told Me Not to Come" is a pact-with-the-devil story that travels through party

space to end on a neatly manufactured twist; Neal Stephenson provides a doodle about a man eating breakfast cereal in Hong Kong; Poppy Z. Brite another doodle about two boys enjoying sex and drugs in Amsterdam. Others include Douglas Rushkoff's quiet and dark prose poem "Is Everybody Here?"; Nicholas Blincoe's "English Astronaut," a hectic quest for transcendence in Jerusalem with a record-player as an ingenious McGuffin; Douglas Coupland's studied farewell to 20th-century iconography in "Fire at the Ativan Factory"; and Helen Mead's hopeful technopagans in "Game On." All seem to stand at the edge of a great voyage, looking backward. It's time to say goodbye to yesterday's tomorrows; it's time to move on.

Paul J. McAuley

## At Lovecraft's Altar (and Alternatives)

David L. Stone

Chaosium titles aren't particularly easy to find in this country, but they do have a tendency to abound in the smaller/independent role-play outlets. Perhaps the main reason for this is because all Chaosium titles are generally tied to the life and works of H. P. Lovecraft, and they also produce the internationally popular role-play game *Call of Cthulhu* (based on his short story of the same name).

The second revised edition of *The Hastur Cycle* (Chaosium, \$12.95/£7.99) contains reprinted works from Lovecraft himself and several other notorious contributors to his Cthulhu Mythos. The book includes an introduction by series editor Robert M. Price, author, theologian and long-time fiction editor of *Crypt of Cthulhu*, and he also provides a lengthy (but interesting) preface to each story.

The first two tales, "Haita the Shepherd" and "An Inhabitant of Carcosa," are by Ambrose Bierce, an author whose biographical account is more chilling than most of his stories. These two offerings have been gleaned from Bierce's collection *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians*, first published in 1891. The latter is also one of the first original ghost stories in which the protagonist eventually makes the frightening discovery that he himself is a ghost. "The Repairer of Reputations" by Robert W. Chambers is, perhaps, the most subtle tale in the anthology, set in the (narrative) universe of Hastur, the King in Yellow. Chambers' second offering, "The Yellow Sign," tells of an artist whose young model repeatedly suf-

fers nightmares concerned with his death. She dreams of a procession carrying a coffin where he lies, not dead, but dormant. It is an eerie tale, interspersed with moments of genuine brilliance, and Chambers's descriptive skills are remarkably effective throughout.

On fine form, as ever, are Ramsey Campbell (with the recent demise of Karl Edward Wagner, he is one of only two living authors represented in the book) and Lin Carter. Campbell's "The Mine on Yuggoth" is one of the author's early Mythos tales, and Carter's half fiction/half play "Tatters of the King" is wonderfully original. Arthur Machen fans will undoubtedly already be in possession of his story "The Novel of the Black Seal" (one of the mystically inclined Welshman's most highly regarded tales, along with "The Shining Pyramid" and "The Red Hand") but Price's notes include mention of Machen's curious views on "little people" which true followers cannot afford to miss.

Lovecraft's own contribution, "The Whisperer in Darkness," needs little introduction. However, Price lends his considerable knowledge of the writer's movements by including some crucial background information on the production of the tale. According to this entry, Lovecraft spent two weeks with his friend Vrest Orton in the latter's rented summer house in Guilford, Vermont. All names used in the story were permutations of district names in the Brattleboro area at that time. The story itself will be familiar to many readers as one of the very best

of Lovecraft's Mythos tales.

Dedicated to Fritz Leiber, this paperback collection comes wrapped in a garish cover and is decidedly unattractive to look at, attaining a degree of ugliness that can only be the result of a special effort. Don't be put off. For Lovecraft fans, it's a veritable gold-mine. Other authors represented here include Joseph Payne Brennan, August Derleth, Richard A. Lupoff, James Wade and Karl Edward Wagner.

If you do have trouble locating this and other Chaosium titles (I found this one in an independent role-play store in Canterbury) they can be obtained by ordering direct from Chaosium at Chaosium Inc., 950 56th Street, Oakland, CA 94608-3136, USA. They also have a website at <http://www.sirius.com/~chaosium/chaosium.html>. Other (recent) books in the aforementioned Cthulhu cycle include individual related collections by Robert Bloch (*Mysteries of the Worm*), Henry Kuttner (*The Book of Iod*), Ramsey Campbell (*Made in Goatswood*) and Lin Carter (*The Xothic Legend Cycle*). Another Chaosium anthology of note, *The Disciples of Cthulhu*, contains the only Cthulhu Mythos story ever nominated for a Nebula Award (Ramsey Campbell's "The Tugging"). Of course, if you're not a Lovecraft fan, steer clear.

It is interesting (and extraordinarily rare) to watch a new fiction-based magazine make the enviable transition from small-press publication to semi-prozine. Few have managed it, the latest to do so being Andy Cox's inimitable *The Third Alternative*. Armed with two British Fantasy Awards (for Best Small Press, and Best Short Story by American newcomer Martin Simpson) and an Eastern Arts Board grant, it ploughs the choppy waters between horror and slipstream fiction.

The obvious difference between *TTA* and poorer relations lies in the quality of its presentation. Produced quarterly, it boasts gloss throughout with stunning artwork and (generally) clear photographs of whichever author appears beneath its curiously selective spotlight. Subjects of study have included Geoff Ryman, Ian McEwan, J. G. Ballard, Kim Stanley Robinson, Nicholas Royle, Christopher Priest and Storm Constantine.

As far as fiction is concerned, Andy Cox has aimed to provide a home for budding stars as well as the in-crowd of (Jones & Sutton-associated) familiars. Recent issues have seen talented newcomers such as (the above-mentioned) Martin Simpson, James Miller, Paul Meloy and Justina Robson, rubbing shoulders with established names like David Langford, Mark Morris, Conrad Williams, James Lovegrove and Peter Crowther.

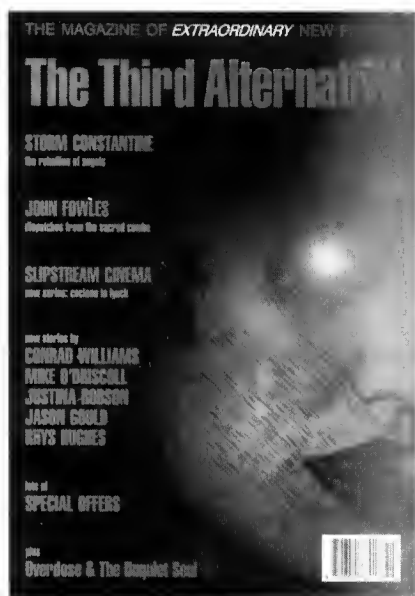
As well as profiles, fiction and art-

work, *TTA* has two regular columns, one from England and one from the USA. Rick Cadger's "The Unquiet Soul" started as an interactive column but has recently developed into a comment piece. One of Cadger's discussions was a deeply moving account of the writer's thoughts on the Dunblane tragedy. Rick's American counterpart, Mark McLaughlin, provides his amusing (Patrick McGrath and Poppy Z. Brite-worshipping) column "View From The Colonies." Although insightful, this veers more towards a book-review section than a general-comment piece.

Curiously, *TTA*'s letters page is a focal point all on its own. I must confess a tendency (conceited as I am) to skip these viewpoint sections of magazines unless I've contributed. However, with *TTA*, the letters are mostly concerned with the future of the horror genre and spawn surprisingly convincing arguments between readers and writers, and have included Ramsey Campbell denying the fact that burgeoning powers Nicholas Royle and Mark Morris are replacing writers such as Shaun Hutson and "old-stools" (his own words) like himself.

Overall, *The Third Alternative* is a young magazine bursting with life and I'm prepared to make a black-veined prophecy that the best is yet to come. Highly recommended. Unfortunately all back issues of *TTA* have sold out, but the current issue, number 15, is available from TTA Press, 5 Martins Lane, Witcham, Ely, Cambs. CB6 2LB. It is priced £3 (post free in the UK) with subs at £11.

*David L. Stone (who is not the same person as novelist Dave Stone) is a freelance writer and is secretary of the newly-formed Kent SF/Fantasy Society. He can be contacted via the K.F.S. at 68 Bellevue Road, Ramsgate, Kent CT11 8DN, or by e-mail at: Deathtrap@compuserve.com*



## Surf's Up

Peter Crowther

At the famous – or, to some, infamous – Monterey Festival in the late 1960s Jimi Hendrix announced from the stage, before embarking on one of his most sense-numbing virtuoso performances, "You'll never listen to surf music again." Thirty years later, within the one-time fairly strict parameters of the horror/dark fantasy field of popular literature, a similar revolution now seems to be taking place. The reasons for this subtle shift in emphasis away from the more overt (some might say "gratuitous," though that's a far more emotive term) levels of the past two decades could be attributed to many causes but it's probably reasonable to lay the "blame" at just one: the lucrative vein of horror fiction has been all but exhausted.

The potential for innovation has been withered by the cumulative effect of a glut of books and stories which – while for the most part they have continued to entertain... particularly those by writers and editors who have proven themselves masters of the genre – have reduced the possibility of surprise and, for want of a better phrase, fearful excitement... around which, by simple definition, the many-roomed manse of horror was built. (One should always remember that even the most sumptuous dish can be an absolute turn-off to someone who has just spent the past four hours – or, in the case of most contemporary horror, 30 years – piggling out.)

Writing horror fiction is an area which is becoming ever more difficult to break into: in fact, there are increasing mutterings to be heard from some practitioners already working in the field that it's hard

enough to *stay* in it, let alone break *into* it. Of course, there are many who refer to the current situation – one in which it's been mooted that some retailers are actually considering removing horror sections from their High Street outlets – as a cyclical thing. *It'll come back around again*, they say. And they're probably right. But it's my view that, when it does come back, it won't look much like it did before it went. Indeed, the changes are already upon us.

Of course, there are many books still published within the sphere of what we refer to as "horror" fiction but far fewer than in its heyday. But the most worrying aspect is that innovation is harder to find. Even the now-hackneyed sobriquet "dark fantasy" has apparently failed to reverse the trend, and it has been left to the more adventurous in the dark-literature fraternity to see what would happen if they shifted the viewpoint a little.

It's probably fair to say that this shift started – or at least reached a stage where it was both visible and identifiable – with the so-called "mis-erabilist" movement. It was not an unqualified success, not by any means, but it did produce some ground-breaking works and authors. No, it's probably not fair to say that it *produced* the authors, for many were working and producing fine work long before: rather it served both to give these reckless scribes a degree of credibility (albeit that this manifested itself initially as light-hearted ridicule) and to identify a new pathway leading away from the Fiction crossroads-signpost that had for so long simply pointed five ways: Mainstream; Science Fiction; Fantasy; Crime and Mystery; Horror.

This new pointer bears no destination name, but the brave (or "fool-hardy," depending on one's point of view) have decided to go up the path at least a little way and check out what was happening ... dodging off into the long grasses at the side and, occasionally, even way over into the shadowy area beneath the trees ... the places where the sun just doesn't shine, it's always cold and the things that grow there cannot easily be described. And, in many instances, they certainly cannot be *ascribed* to anything remotely supernatural ... though a darkness of *spirit* is commonplace.

Thus, building on what had already been achieved by the likes of Ian McEwan, Stephen Gregory, the irrepressible Ramsey Campbell (always an innovator) and even Clive Barker, plus, in the United States, Charles L. Grant and Dennis Etchison (for both writing *and* editing), and Jonathan Carroll ... came Nicholas Royle (with the flagship *Counterparts* and the two *Darklands*

anthologies), Simon Maginn (with *Sheep* and *Virgins And Martyrs*), Joel Lane (*The Earth Wire*), Michael Marshall Smith (with so much but, for me, first and foremost, with "The Dark Land"), Richard Christian Matheson (*Created By*), Barry Hoffman (*Hungry Eyes*), Andy Cox (with the truly wonderful *The Third Alternative* magazine), Richard Chizmar (*Midnight Promises*), John Burnside (with the criminally ignored *The Dumb House*) and Graham Joyce ... about whom, more in a minute.

And, lest we forget, it's surely no simple coincidence or stroke of blind good fortune that so many of these, and others, have been championed in the pages of Stephen Jones's anthologies – most notably the *Dark Voices/Dark Terrors* series, which Jones co-edits with David Sutton. (And if anyone really wants to know how sublime the so-called "horror" field has become these days, they should check out Dennis Etchison's "The Last Reel" in *Dark Terrors* 3.)

The common factor – or "vision" – in all of these works and of these writers and editors is hard to break down but I suggest it is, at least in part, this: an almost total abandonment of genre staples, those tried, trusted and now quite tired stereotypes and *deus ex machinas* employed to give colour and flavour and simply to make things work out the way the author intended ... or hoped.

I mentioned Graham Joyce and Jonathan Carroll, and it's fitting that most of this column should be devoted to their new novels, each of which serves to illustrate my point.

Of those writers who stoically refuse to trudge along horror fiction's well-worn path, Joyce, with British Fantasy Awards to his credit for *Requiem* and *The Tooth Fairy*, has perhaps had the most success. And now we can add to that list *The Stormwatcher* (Penguin, £5.99), which is almost as much a credit to Penguin for publishing it – bearing in mind the author's following within the genre's circles – as it is to Joyce for actually writing it. For this remarkable, fine and almost unclassifiable book is a complete breath of fresh air, even considering his past achievements.

The story is simply (!) the interaction of a group of somewhat dysfunctional friends during a two-week holiday in a lonely cottage in the Dordogne region of France. The group comprises James and his French wife, Sabine, and their two young daughters – Beth and the confused Jessie – plus James's one-time colleague Matt and his wife, Chrissie ... and, just to make things interesting, the sultry Rachel, another work-chum of James ... and one with whom he has shared considerably more than the occasional business meeting.

As the story progresses we discover that one of the party – an unnamed instructor whose identity is kept hidden until the end of the book – is engaged in secret lessons with the impressionable Jessie, for reasons not immediately clear. Meanwhile, courtesy of a nicely-realized series of tense-changed flashbacks, we learn more of the instructor's background and an almost symbiotic relationship in which both she and her lover speak only lies to each other.

All the time, Jessie grows more intense and confused while, around her, other members of the party grow, by turn, increasingly belligerent or subservient, manipulative or malleable, paranoid or confident. And underpinning the sequence of events is an intense feeling of primal sensuality evoked both by the environment and an approaching storm (its progress cleverly interjected into the proceedings by a series of half-page chapters explaining meteorological behaviour) and by the behaviour of the adults as their feelings for each other – and their protectiveness and confusion at the antics of and comments from young Jessie – swirl and eddy.

Essentially mainstream (if one feels one has to give it a catch-all, despite an overwhelming but – with the exception of one quite extraordinarily chilling section quite late in the book – hard to pin-point sense of menace and the unreal, *The Stormwatcher* is a powerhouse of a novel, calling to mind the work and styles of D. H. Lawrence and Graham Swift (whose *Waterland* remains a landmark novel of alienation and displacement) and the downbeat mysteries and the human flotsam and jetsam characters from the likes of P. D. James and Barbara Vine. Work of this stature and calibre that can only bode well for the future – both Joyce's and that of the entire field – and I commend it to you unservedly.

As, indeed, I commend *Kissing the Beehive* (Gollancz, £14.99), the latest in a series of vintage novels from Jonathan Carroll.

A couple of FantasyCons ago, on a panel, Carroll announced that he did not want to be thought of as a "horror writer," a proclamation that may well have caused a degree of umbrage to be taken by some of those present. Well, true to his word, his new book contains nary the slightest hint of anything out-of-kilter with the everyday ... though some of the characters display many of his characters' usual traits of being decidedly out-of-sync. One or two of them menacingly so.

The *Beehive* of the title is a nickname given (for reasons revealed later in the book) to the late Pauline Ostrova, a young woman whose body was discovered some 20 years ago by



the then youthful Sam Bayer floating in the Hudson River. The passage of time has been both kind and cruel to Bayer and we find him, at the start of the book, a successful novelist racking his brains for an idea for his next fiction project. A conversation with his agent – God bless ‘em, one and all – has Bayer return to his boyhood upstate New York town of Crane’s View to unravel the circumstances of Pauline’s death and produce a serious work of non-fiction.

Pauline’s murder was attributed to her then-current boyfriend, Edward Durant, who was tried, convicted and sentenced to prison, where he committed suicide, aged 21, following a prolonged bout of sexual abuse by the other inmates. Good riddance, some might say. But there was always a deep-rooted belief by many in the town – including Bayer himself, Durant’s father and Crane View’s Chief of Police ... the one-time neighbourhood-bully, Frannie McCabe – that Durant was innocent of the crime. And so it is, ostensibly under the guise of writing a Great Book, that Bayer and McCabe set out to unravel the circumstances leading up to the murder all those years ago.

In the movie *Moonlight and Valentino* – which I happened to see during the reading of this book – there’s a scene where the Whoopi Goldberg character goes to great lengths to breathe new life into her failing marriage and, as she sees it, her increasingly uninterested husband. It’s only when she begins what she hopes will be the “healing process” that she realizes it wasn’t her husband who was blighting the relationship but rather she herself. It’s little discoveries such as these – the sudden understanding of our innermost thoughts and the tiny quiet truths about ourselves and those around us ... revelations which occur when we least expect them – that Carroll has made his stock in trade. And he’s at his most perceptive in *Kissing the Beehive*.

Terminal illness, infidelity, infatuation, parental love and a man – Bayer himself – who, having temporarily lost both his way and his motivation, attempts to return to the familiar comforts and surroundings of his own past: all these intermingle in a tense and complex tale of old wrongs, with the mystery deepening even as parts of it are revealed. Into the cast come a boy with severe learning disabilities (but who has nevertheless committed to memory all of the television adverts of the past 20 or 30 years); Veronica Lake, a woman who professes to be Bayer’s greatest fan (and who occasionally dresses up as characters from his novels); and a mysterious stranger who just may hold the answer to the riddle and who communicates with Bayer

through a series of Post-it notes left when nobody is watching. More killings follow ... Veronica’s behaviour becomes more and more irrational ... and Bayer’s daughter, Cassandra, and her boyfriend become caught up in the intrigue.

Coming to the end of *Kissing the Beehive* was both a great excitement and a great disappointment. The mystery is resolved beautifully and entirely satisfactorily, and the book itself is completed with a neat, believable and quite poignant epilogue section. So no complaints there at all. But one becomes so immersed into the lives of Carroll’s characters – and particularly into the mind of Bayer himself – that it’s a huge wrench to let them all go.

It’s as much as you could ever hope for from a book, and a lot more than you usually get.

Getting back to Hendrix, and *that* statement at Monterey, I have to say that *I* have listened to surf music regularly over the past three decades. Still do. But I did – and do – also embrace the new and exhilarating brand of music to which Hendrix and his like drew our attention. Any attempt to broaden artistic horizons should always be championed and supported, whatever the particular branch of the arts. One should always remember that movement in the stillest pond gives life to *all* where no movement leads only to stagnation.

And finally, a word about an excellent new chapbook. Regular readers of my columns will know I have a soft spot for the work of Ed Gorman. I remain unbowed. Despite being

incredibly prolific – an output among which one might understand or even expect (if not necessarily *forgive*) the occasional lapse of judgment or quality – Gorman never fails to deliver exceptional work, dipping his toe into every conceivable sub-genre and sub-sub-genre of the mystery and dark suspense field and producing gems with apparent and enviable ease.

Gorman’s stock in trade is, quite simply, heart ... of which he has an abundance. His motto appears to be, if the reader doesn’t care about the characters then he or she will not care about what happens to them. And the three long-ish stories contained in *Eye of the Beholder* (Revolver, £10 post free) are wonderful evidence of this fact.

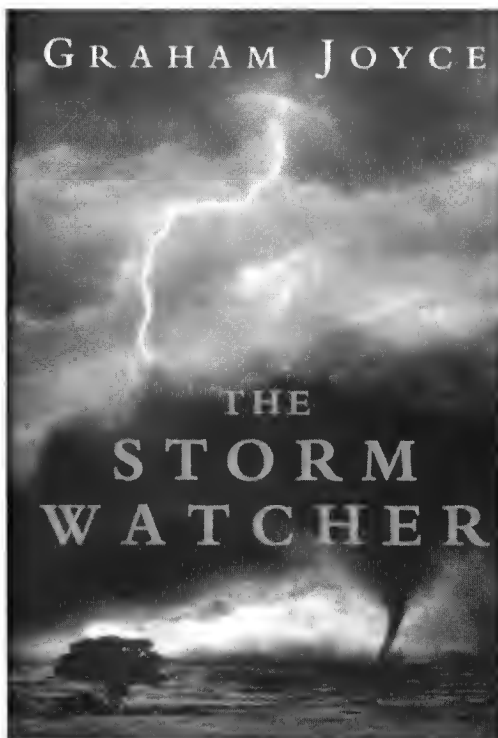
In “The Long Way Back” a man drops in on his alcoholic brother and his family, only to discover that the brother has added an addiction to gambling to his “credits” ... with a late-night crap-shoot leading to disastrous consequences on the very day of his visit. And in “The Way it Used to Be” a small-town, racist, teenage tough guy decides to put paid to his sister’s involvement with a young man of the wrong colour ... with things not quite working out the way he intended.

But it’s the title story that is the real icing on the cake. “Eye of the Beholder” features Jack Dwyer, Gorman’s occasional security-guard-cum-private-eye character. Dwyer is an Everyman, a shamus upon whose shoulders the world and the passage of time hangs heavy; for Dwyer, approaching the big five-oh, the future holds no respite save that of slowing down and the promise of home contains only television, take-out meals and restless nights alone in bed, counting mistakes and missed opportunities the way others count sheep.

When we catch up with him in “Eye of the Beholder,” his latest shallow relationship is about to go belly-up... but stormy events within the woman’s dysfunctional family will bring him back in order to solve a brutal and apparently motiveless crime, though the solution reveals motives aplenty. Despite his relatively few appearances, the flawed but immensely human and personable Dwyer deserves to be spoken of in the same breath as Travis McGee, Jim Rockford, Matt Scudder and Max Allan Collins’s Nameless.

Anyone wanting to find out just how good good writing can be should risk ten pounds and write off for this signed and beautifully produced limited edition to Revolver, PO Box 14118, London, NW3 4WU. It’s the safest bet you’ll ever place.

Pete Crowther



This month brings four fantasies written by women, all using both male and female viewpoints with various degrees of success.

The cover of J. V. Jones's *The Barbed Coil* (Orbit, £16.99) quotes the opinion of Robert Jordan that she's "a striking writer... wonderful." My own first observation was that she's the sort of writer who uses "despite the fact that" twice before page 10, but nobody's perfect. In fact, though the writing's sloppy at times (Jones has trouble with strong Germanic verbs and with auxiliaries), the book has a certain charm. Despite running to over 600 pages, it's a thoroughly unpretentious helping of Sword & Sorcery, belonging to the slightly old-fashioned sub-genre (dating back to De Camp & Pratt) wherein someone from our own world gets catapulted into a more exciting milieu, there to play a key role in dramatic events, through which she finds herself.

Tessa McCamfrey has led an unsatisfactory life in San Diego, being afflicted with a form of intermittent tinnitus which can approach *grand mal* intensity. This quite overcomes her initial dismay at being pitchforked into an entirely new world: it's a world without tinnitus. But alas, all is not well – it's a world under threat from Izgard of Garizon, an exceptionally repellent villain. It is his misfortune, and the misfortune of everyone involved with him, that he is able to comprehend only one form of human relationship. Master and man, man and beast, general and soldier, king and subject, friend and companion, lover and sweetheart – all are converted into the only one that matters: torturer and victim (he's a touchy-feely guy). So all-encompassing is his love, his ultimate intention is to master the entire world and torture all its inhabitants forever.

Predictably, Tessa has a key part in a long-planned scheme to foil him, and almost as predictably she falls in with a hard-bitten soldier of fortune who has reasons of his own for wanting to thwart Izgard. The two become separated as the conflict heats up on the physical and magical planes, and the story proceeds at a cracking pace. I would probably have liked this book better than I did but for a jarring synchronicity which is really no one's fault: it happens that the assumptions, plot mechanisms, and structure are all insistently reminiscent of Jenny Jones's *Flight Over Fire* trilogy, but nothing is quite as well done. In particular this Jones hasn't that Jones's extraordinary control of atmosphere and the background/action/characterization relationship.

In a way, I hate to say this; comparisons are invidious, and it seems dreadfully unfair to condemn a more

than adequate work for being less good than something very similar by a woman of very similar name – I've no reason to assume this Jones has read that Jones. On the other hand, as I keep on saying, it's a crowded field. It has by now become so crowded that every new entry is likely to have strong resonances with at least one pre-existing work. If it hadn't been *Flight Over Fire*, it might have been something I hadn't read, or something less good instead of better, and this review would have been more favourable. Take heed, anyone who is thinking of writing some S&S of his or her own. This is by no means a bad book, but I kept wishing I was re-reading *Flight Over Fire* instead. You, Reader, have that option.

If a writer is good, a characteristic mannerism, turn of phrase or quirk of vocabulary is an expression of a unique, individual style. In a bad writer it will express insensitivity to the language, self-indulgence or both. Sarah Ash is a good writer, but she needs to restrain her habit of indicating an analogue by coining words which are very close to some familiar European equivalent, lest it degenerate into a cultivated vice. *The Lost Child* (Orion, £9.99, C-format) features a scattered people called Tsiyonim who speak Yiddish, reject shellfish and refer to all others as Gentiles, which suggests that she's trying to do for the Ashkenazim what Guy Gavriel Kay did for the Sephardim in *The Lions of Al-Rassan*. That is no small order, and I must say at once that Ash has nothing like Kay's grandeur and scope, let alone his depth; this is a simple, albeit very sure-footed, romance.

The story is straightforward, once you get used to Ash's trick of grafting onto traditional Jewish folklore sundry purpose-built elements, specifically a quartet of guardian angel/demons, each responding to ("controlled by" would imply too much) a particular part of a broken amulet. To invoke the power of any one of them (they correspond loosely

to the concepts of Fire, Frost, Flood and Death) is not only to embody it, but to place your own body and soul in jeopardy; yet in Ash's world, which corresponds no less loosely to late-medieval France, the menace of pogroms/persecutions/massacres is once again abroad in the land – her youthful protagonists have no real option but to press on.

How you respond to this book will be very much a matter of background. I presume the Palestinian/Iraqi/Taliban axis will condemn Ash's celebration of Judaism, while what survives of European Jewry may welcome a friend at a time when Islam is more in fashion. Me, I note that Ash's suspense-writing is excellent, being based on all too familiar models of lethal persecution from York to Warsaw by way of Algeciras. Here the precipitating incident is the manslaughter of a child by a foolish soldier/poet who should have known better than to dabble untutored in the Black Arts. He lays the corpse (literally) at the door of Schimeon the tailor, thereby initiating the pogrom; he himself, as investigating officer, has the strongest possible motive to perpetrate and perpetuate injustice at every turn.

Corruption of motive is the theme of this book, and Ash handles it grimly well, as it seems that every other definable group in the city of Arcassanne develops a motive for shifting its own guilt onto the quasi-Jews. How can they react, without pouring Hellfire on their own children's heads? How can they not react, without their quiescence being taken for admission of guilt? Because one knows only too well what actually happened on so many occasions – Lincoln, Lvov, Vilnius – Ash needs only to avoid going over the top to produce a fantasy-thriller of nail-biting power.

Only one element is missing – no role is assigned to the Christian church. Hardly a priest is mentioned, the many lucubrations of the Gentiles are devoid of religious content, no one ever goes to church for sanctuary, let alone to pray. This omission vitiates the context of the tale, as medieval and Renaissance anti-Semitism was fundamentally religious and only marginally racial in motivation – just glance at the scenes in *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Jew of Malta* relating, respectively, to the marriage of Jessica and the conversion of Abigail. It also misses an obvious trick, since to have a priest who spurs on the excesses of his flock, a priest who seeks to curb them, or (best of all) one of each would be an obvious and legitimate way of heightening the emotional and intellectual content. Instead Ash imposes a superstitious but essentially secular form of 19th/20th century racism on a mystical medieval milieu, with loss of focus and credibility. This book lacks the elegance of *Songspinner*, (reviewed in

## Four Fat Fantasies

Chris Gilmore

*Interzone* 111), and consequently requires a more drastic suspension of disbelief; but if she can work it out a little more carefully, it bodes well for her fourth novel.

From quasi-France to quasi-Scotland (here called Lusara) where there's more persecution, of alleged sorcerers on this occasion. They don't actually practise sorcery, they just have what we old-timers call psi powers, so Kate Jacoby's *Exile's Return* (Gollancz, £16.99) has more in common with sf than fantasy, not that either will be very keen to claim it.

King Selar is a tyrannical usurper (or at best conqueror) who terrorizes the people through the Guilde (which enforces a monopoly of all knowledge including literacy) and the Malachi (renegade sorcerers), so we seem set for a pleasant and relaxing tussle between Good and Evil, but no such luck. Robert, Earl of Dunlorn, the most powerful sorcerer of his generation, returns to Lusara after three years' absence and quickly runs into Jenn, a waif whose sorcerous potential dwarfs even his own but is at present untrained, uncontrolled and a danger to herself and anyone close to her.

So far, so good; but Jacoby insists on introducing wholly unnecessary idiocies which serve only to impede the plot and annoy the reader. Robert and Selar go back a long way, it seems; happened like this. In the course of the final battle which won him the kingdom, Selar just happened to fall into a river when none of his men was nearby, and would have drowned unnoticed except that Robert happened along and fished him out. Does Robert therefore take him prisoner and turn him over to the legitimate king to whom he owes fealty? No. Seeing that Selar's winning anyway, he turns him loose to finish the battle and get crowned. In most eyes that would make Robert a vile turncoat, but not in Jacoby's. She takes the line that as victory for the home team might have led to a worse outcome, Robert done right, and anyone who disagrees is missin' da Big Picture. It's of a piece with the rest of her conception.

At another point Robert and Jenn take shelter in an isolated farm while the owners are at market, leaving behind just one old man and his servant. Do they make themselves known and politely request such hospitality as they require? No, they go and lurk in the stables, so when raiders attack the place they're in the wrong place to protect their unwitting hosts, who therefore get put to the sword. All right, Robert avenges them, but do they await the return of the farmer and his family so as to explain what happened to Grandad? No again – they just ride away from the mess without even leaving a bread-and-butter note. It's

OK writing stuff where the bad guys are irredeemably bad and the good guys hampered by their innate decency, but in this book nobody has the least idea of what's required in even minimally polite society. I don't care what they say about Celtic supporters, Scotland was never like this.

Predictably, the execution is almost as sloppy as the conception. "Micah lifted the earthenware jug of wine and moved around the room filling the goblets with rich, spicy mead." And no, he's not a sorcerer's apprentice playing silly buggers with the drinks; it's just the sort of blip you get when editors are too grand to edit.

To conclude on a high note, there are very few new ideas, and few of those are any good, but Robin Hobb has had one and made it the central conceit of *Ship of Magic* (Bantam, \$23.95; Voyager, £17.99). Suppose the figurehead of a sailing vessel were possessed of will and personality, that the keel and planking of the ship were its body, and that it was capable of forming a special kind of relationship with its master? So it is, not with ships of common wood, but with the "liveships" of Hobb's rich, complex, unfinished novel.

Though Hobb's writing is a little slapdash in places, her plotting is complex but tightly controlled, and her descriptive powers match her excellent visual imagination. But her chief virtue is that she delineates character extremely well: all her characters have their virtues, and the defects of their virtues, and they all make sense in terms of their histories. Flesh and blood or witchwood figureheads, they come alive – and therefore we care for them. Consequently the plot makes sense as well – no one is compelled to act inconsistently to move things along, no one's motivation seems at all

far-fetched. Even the feelings of the liveships are just about believable; I'm not sure I'd greatly relish being reincarnated as the head and torso of a statuesque beauty or muscular warrior with neither legs nor genitals, but I guess a clipper beats a wheelchair.

Hobb's tale is essentially tragic in the classical sense. Each of the major characters is impelled by a strong sense of duty, but their concepts of how to discharge the duties they have chosen or had thrust upon them are mutually exclusive. The death of Captain Ephron Vestrit (apparently from cancer) is the catalyst which both quickens *Vivacia*, the Vestrit family liveship, to full consciousness and precipitates the conflict. His daughter, Althea, is in love with the ship and wishes to maintain the proud traditions of her family; his son-in-law, Kyle, can see the family going bust unless all its assets, and especially the ship, are ruthlessly exploited to maximum profit – and if that means refitting *Vivacia* as a slaver, so be it. Caught between them are Ephron's widow, Kyle's wife and children and the ship herself, whose personality is engaging, but still very immature; where personality exists, there is scope for personality defects.

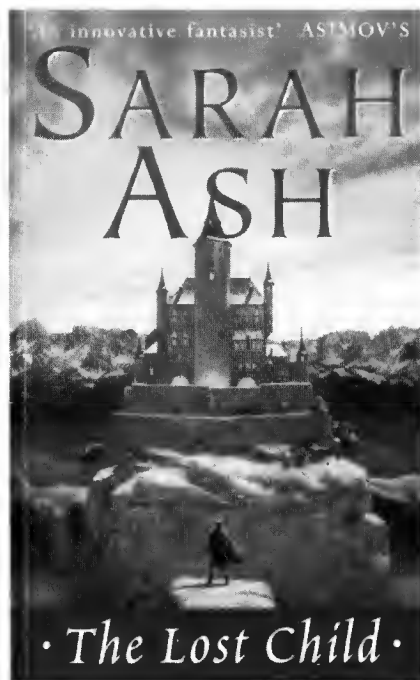
Meanwhile three other narratives are steering for collision with the main plot. Kennit is a pirate captain who craves to be something better than a pirate, but his imagination is limited; his ambition is to be pirate king. Sorcor, his bucko mate, also craves to be something better, but in an incompatible mode. Their conflict provides the finest aspect of an exceptional book, as Kennit finds that he can only serve his ambitions by allowing himself to be drawn into paths of unnatural virtue. Will the lure of virtue overcome the habit of vice?

The liveship *Paragon* was quickened in appalling circumstances, and subsequently went mad. He is now beached and derelict, but probably salvageable – if anyone dares take the risk. He has a few friends left, but they have little influence; can they (and should they) save him from the breakers?

The increasing slave trade has aroused the interest of the Tangle, intelligent sea serpents who follow slave ships to batten on the sick and dead thrown overboard. What part will Maulkin, their leader, play in the outcome?

My only objection to the book is that none of the above questions is answered, for (although it's not indicated on my proof copy) this is but the first volume in an n-volume novel. It ends abruptly, with none of the important questions even close to resolution, and by rights the next volume should begin with Chapter 37. I await it eagerly.

Chris Gilmore



## BOOKS RECEIVED



MARCH  
1998

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by *Interzone* during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in *italics* at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the *mogazine*.

Alexander, Ric, ed. **The Unexplained: Stories of the Paranormal**. Introduction by Peter James. Orion, ISBN 1-75281-004-9, 433pp, hardcover, £17.99. (Sf/horror anthology, first edition; there is a simultaneous C-format paperback edition [not seen]; it contains mainly reprint stories arranged under various thematic headings – "Supernatural Mysteries," "Psychic Phenomena," "Alien Encounters," "Time Warps" and "Urban Legends"; authors include J. G. Ballard, Clive Barker, Ramsey Campbell, C. J. Cherryh, Harlan Ellison, Robert A. Heinlein, Gerald Kersh, Nigel Kneale, Ursula Le Guin, Arthur Machen, Richard Matheson, Olaf Stapledon, Theodore Sturgeon, Ian Watson [a story reprinted from *Interzone*] and Roger Zelazny; the stories by Richard Layman and Graham Masterton are originals; "Ric Alexander" is a pseudonym of veteran anthologist Peter Haining.) 16th March 1998.

Applegate, K. A. **The Alien**. "Animorphs, 8." Scholastic/Hippo, ISBN 0-590-19792-4, 156pp, B-format paperback, £3.99. (Juvenile sf/horror novel, first published in the USA, 1997.) March 1998.

Banks, Iain M. **Inversions**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-626-2, 345pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; the blurb makes the plot and setting sound rather Dark-Agey and mysterious, so this perhaps has more of the feel of fantasy than sf.) 4th June 1998.

Barrow, John D. **The Artful Universe: The Limits of Science and the Science of Limits**. Oxford University Press, ISBN 0-19-851890-0, xiii+279pp, hardcover, £18.99. (Popular science text, first edition; it's about "what limits there might be to human discovery, and what we might find, ultimately, to be unknowable, unobtainable, or unthinkable"; Professor Barrow frequently quotes from sf and fantasy writers, including the sage Terry Pratchett: "In the beginning there was nothing. And the Lord said: 'Let there be light' and there was still nothing, but now you could see it.") No date shown: received in March 1998.

Baxter, Stephen. **Traces**. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-225427-1, 359pp, hardcover, cover by Chris Moore, £16.99. (Sf collection, first edition; a fine, fat volume of 21 unconnected stories, of which no less than a dozen first appeared in *Interzone*; recommended.) 20th April 1998.

Baxter, Stephen. **Vacuum Diagrams: Stories of the Xeelee Sequence**. "Stephen Baxter's history of the universe." Voyager, ISBN 0-00-649812-4, 464pp, A-format paperback, £6.99. (Sf collection, first published in 1997; a gathering, with some new linking matter, of all Baxter's "Xeelee" stories; many of them first appeared in *Interzone*, although a number come from Asimov's *SF*, *SF Age* and various small-press magazines; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 122.) 20th April 1998.

Beagle, Peter S. **The Innkeeper's Song**. Souvenir Press, ISBN 0-285-63429-1, 346pp, B-format paperback, cover by Matthew Williams, £9.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1993; oddly, this seems to be the first-ever British edition of this major fantasy which John Clute, in his glowing review of the American edition in *Interzone* 80, seemed to think was Beagle's finest to date; so what went wrong with Beagle's career on this side of the Atlantic, that he couldn't get this book published for five years in the UK and then had to settle for a minor publisher and mediocre cover art?) 20th March 1997.

Bova, Ben. **Moonrise**. Avon/Eos, ISBN 0-380-78697-4, 560pp, A-format paperback, £6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1996; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 118.) Late entry: 11th February publication, received in March 1998.

Bova, Ben. **Moonwar**. Avon/Eos, ISBN 0-380-97303-0, 388pp, hardcover, £23. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1997; the British [Hodder & Stoughton] edition was sub-titled "Book II of

the Moonbase Saga," but this one isn't.) Late entry: 11th February publication, received in March 1998.

Bunch, Chris. **The Seer King**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-490-1, vi+618pp, A-format paperback, cover by Keith Scaiffe, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1997.) 2nd April 1998.

Card, Orson Scott. **Heartfire**. "The Tales of Alvin Maker." Tor, ISBN 0-312-85054-9, 301pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; there will be a simultaneous limited edition priced at \$200; this is the fifth volume in what is widely perceived as Card's best series, following *Seventh Son* [1987], *Red Prophet* [1988], *Prentice Alvin* [1989] and *Alvin Journeyman* [1995].) August 1998.

Chalker, Jack L. **The Hot-Wired Dodo: Book Three of The Wonderland Gambit**. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-38849-6, viii+338pp, A-format paperback, cover by Paul Youll, \$6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1997; follow-up to *The Cybematic Wolrus* and *The March Hare Network*.) Late entry: 1st February publication, received in March 1998.

Clark, William R. **The New Healers: The Promise and Problems of Molecular Medicine in the Twenty-First Century**. Oxford University Press, ISBN 0-19-511730-1, ix+245pp, hardcover, £16. (Popular science text, first published in the USA, 1997; it's about all the coming possibilities of genetic research, and as such might serve as a useful source-book for sf writers; this is the American [OUP, NY] edition with a UK price added.) 5th March 1998.

Clarke, Arthur C. **3001: The Final Odyssey**. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-42349-6, 274pp, A-format paperback, \$6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1997; the concluding novel in the "2001" saga; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 119.) 1st March 1998.

Clemens, James. **Wit'ch Fire**. "Book One of The Banned and the Banished." Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-41705-4, x+439pp, trade paperback, cover by Brom, \$13.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; it's copyright "Jim Czajkowski," and is a debut novel by a new American writer, born 1961; there seems to be no end to the number of these Big Commercial Fantasies by unknown authors which US [and UK] publishers are prepared to launch on the world with all the fanfare of generous advertising budgets and multi-city signing tours; no doubt the stakes are high, and indeed the author reveals exactly what he's aiming for when he mentions bestseller Terry Brooks in the first sentence of his acknowledgments.) June 1998.

Cole, Allan. **Wizard of the Winds**. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-40177-8, 422pp, A-format paperback, cover by Stephen Hickman, \$6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the UK as *When the Gods Slept*, 1997; it doesn't say so clearly, but this is the first book of the "Timura Trilogy" – Eastern-flavoured stuff inspired by *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*.) 1st March 1998.

Crowther, Peter, and James Lovegrove. **Escardy Gap**. Earthlight, ISBN 0-671-01605-9, 543pp, A-format paperback, cover by Les Edwards, £5.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1996; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 116; this is the second title to be released under Simon & Schuster's new "Earthlight" imprint.) April 1998.

Dalkey, Kara. **Bhagavati: Blood of the Goddess, III**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-86003-X, 382pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Historical fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; like its predecessors, it's set in 16th-century India.) May 1998.

Dann, Jack, and Gardner Dozois, eds. **Clones**. Ace, ISBN 0-441-00522-S, xi+256pp, A-format paperback, cover by Lee MacLeod, \$5.99. (Sf anthology, first edition; reprint stories on a biotech theme, culled from various sources [although none, amazingly, are from Asimov's]; authors include Greg Egan, Joe Haldeman, Damon Knight, Ursula Le Guin [the well-known "Nine Lives," from *Ployboy*], Ian R. MacLeod ["Past Master," from *Interzone*], Pamela Sargent, Charles Sheffield, John Varley and Kate Wilhelm; this, by the way, appears to be the 17th in this series of one-word-title theme-anthologies edited by Dann & Dozois for Ace Books: the earlier volumes were primarily fantasy and had exclamation marks in the titles – *Unicorns!*, *Mermaids!*, etc.; latterly they seem to have sobered up and to be concentrating on sf – *Hackers*, *Timegates*, etc.) April 1998.

DeBrandt, Don. **Steeldriver**. Ace, ISBN 0-441-00520-9, 330pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jean Pierre Targete, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; the author is Canadian, and this appears to be his second novel, following an item called *The Quicksilver Screen* [1992]; about a cyborg on another planet, it is blurb'd as "a new kind of cyber-myth" and praised by Spider Robinson.) April 1998.

Dickinson, Peter. **The Flight of Dragons**. Illustrated by Wayne Anderson. Paper Tiger, ISBN 1-85028-411-3, 134pp, very large-format paperback, cover by Anderson, £13.99. (Fantasy art portfolio with substantial, and rather charming, text by Dickinson about dragons in legend and



lore; first published in the UK, 1979; an attractive reissue, recommended for children and dragon-lovers of all ages.) 26th March 1998.

Disch, Thomas M. **The Dreams Our Stuff is Made Of: How Science Fiction Conquered the World.** Simon & Schuster/Free Press, ISBN 0-684-82405-1, 256pp, hardcover, \$25. (Study of sf and its influence on popular culture, first edition; to be reviewed by David Pringle in the next issue of *Interzone*.) May 1998.

Elliott, Kate. **King's Dragon: Volume One of Crown of Stars.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-609-2, vi+594pp, A-format paperback, cover by Melvin Grant, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1997; "Kate Elliott" [or Katrina Elliott, as it says in the copyright statement] is a pseudonym of Alis A. Rasmussen; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 127.) 2nd April 1998.

Elrod, P. N. **Bloodlist: The Vampire Files, Book One.** Ace, ISBN 0-441-06795-6, 200pp, A-format paperback, cover by Fred Gambino, \$5.99. (Horror/crime novel, first published in the USA, 1990; ninth printing.) April (?) 1998.

Feist, Raymond E. **Rage of a Demon King: Volume III of The Serpentwar Saga.** Avon/Eos, ISBN 0-380-72088-4, xiv+588pp, A-format paperback, cover by Liz Kenyon, \$5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1997.) Late entry: February publication, received in March 1998.

Ferguson, Niall, ed. **Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals.** Papermac, ISBN 0-333-64728-9, 548pp, B-format paperback, £10. (Collection of alternative-history essays, first published in 1997; although the book consists of "essays" rather than stories, they are of course fictional essays, accounts of things that never were, and hence the book is a sort of science fiction; the contributors are mostly academic historians; this is the most elaborate exercise of its kind since J. C. Squire's famous tome *If It Had Happened Otherwise* [1931], but it is a more serious work than Squire's, with an excellent, painstaking, 90-page introduction by the editor [who is an Oxford historian – not to be confused with the erstwhile sf novelist and *Interzone*-contributor Neil Ferguson]; recommended; reviewed by Kim Newman in *IZ* 121.) 20th March 1998.

Gilman, Carolyn Ives. **Halfway Human.** Avon/Eos, ISBN 0-380-79799-2, 472pp, A-format paperback, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; it's a debut book by an American writer who has been contributing to the magazines for about a decade [Interzone published a story by her, "Glass Angel," in issue 42]; not to be

confused with fantasy novelist Greer Ilene Gilman, author of *Moonwise* [1991]; Nicola Griffith commends it on the front cover as "the best sf novel I've read in a long time.") Late entry: February publication, received in March 1998.

Hamilton, Peter F. **The Neutroium Alchemist: Book Two of the Night's Dawn Trilogy.** Macmillan, ISBN 0-333-72244-2, 999pp, C-format paperback, cover by Jim Burns, £10.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1997; reviewed by James Lovegrove in *Interzone* 127; it's even longer than volume one, *The Reality Dysfunction*: when complete, this certainly will add up to the biggest space opera ever published.) 20th March 1998.

Harrison, Harry. **Stars and Stripes Forever.** Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-68917-X, 323pp, hardcover, cover by David Hardy, £16.99. (Alternative-world sf novel, first edition; the opening volume of a new trilogy about a 19th-century war-which-never-happened between Britain and the USA.) 19th March 1998.

Holt, Tom. **Open Sesame.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-SS6-8, 312pp, A-format paperback, cover by Steve Lee, £5.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in 1997; reviewed by Ken Brown in *Interzone* 122.) 2nd April 1998.

Holt, Tom. **Wish You Were Here.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-SSS-X, 252pp, hardcover, cover by Paul Cemmick, £15.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition.) 2nd April 1998.

Hurd, Douglas. **The Shape of Ice.** Little, Brown, ISBN 0-316-64032-8, 277pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Near-future political melodrama, first edition; so he's back at it: Britain's erstwhile Foreign Secretary, the Rt. Hon. Lord Hurd of Westwell, CH, CBE, having fallen from office, returns to being an sf hack ... well, almost; it's very much a politician's novel, of course, and the first sentence of the blurb is the sheerest fantasy/wish-fulfillment: "A year on from Tony Blair's crushing defeat at the General Election, the Conservative government cruises into the new parliamentary session with a comfortable lead in the opinion polls"; according to his entry in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, Hurd's previous quasi-sf thrillers include *The Smile on the Face of the Tiger* [1969], about China demanding Hong Kong back with menaces, and *Scotch on the Rocks* [1971], about rampant Scottish nationalism; Hurd is also Chairman of this year's Booker Prize Committee [presumably his own novel will be ineligible – but then genre works always are, aren't they?].) 21st May 1998.

Joyce, Graham. **The Tooth Fairy.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86261-X, 320pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Horror novel, first published in the UK, 1996; reviewed by Paul Brazier in *Interzone* 117; meanwhile Graham Joyce has a new novel, *The Stormwatcher*, out from Penguin Books in the UK, but it has not been sent to us for review [nevertheless, it's reviewed elsewhere in this issue by Peter Crowther, from his personal copy].) Late entry: 20th February publication, received in March 1998.

Kaku, Michio. **Visions: How Science Will Revolutionize the Twenty-First Century.** Oxford University Press, ISBN 0-19-850086-6, xii+403pp, hardcover, no price shown. (Popular science text, first edition; it's a compendious work about near-future possibilities, concentrating on "The Computer Revolution," "The Biomolecular Revolution" and "The Quantum Revolution"; recommended to all would-be sf writers.) No date shown: received in March 1998.

Kessel, John. **Corrupting Dr Nice.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86584-8, 316pp, trade paperback, \$14.95. (Humorous sf novel, first published in the USA, 1997; it's dedicated to various 1930s and 1940s directors of Hollywood screwball comedies ["and, most especially, in admiration for his genius, to Preston Sturges"]; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 120.) March 1998.

Keyes, J. Gregory. **Newton's Cannon: Book One of The Age of Unreason.** Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-40605-2, 355pp, trade paperback, cover by Terese Neilsen, \$14. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; set in the 18th century, it involves Sir Isaac Newton, Benjamin Franklin and alchemical magic – an example of Enlightenment steampunk?) May 1998.

Lee, Adam. **The Dark Shore: Book One of The Dominions of Irth.** Avon/Eos, ISBN 0-380-79617-1, xv+494pp, A-format paperback, \$5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the UK under the author's real name, A. A. Attanasio, 1996; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 111.) Late entry: 11th February publication, received in March 1998.

Leigh, Stephen. **Dark Water's Embrace.** Avon/Eos, ISBN 0-380-79478-0, xiii+331pp, A-format paperback, \$3.99. (Sf novel, first edition; the publishers describe it as being "in the tradition of Ursula K. Le Guin," and it has cover commendations from Joe Haldeman, Maureen F. McHugh and others.) Late entry: 11th February publication, received in March 1998.

Luckhurst, Roger. **"The Angle Between Two Walls": The Fiction of J. G. Ballard.** "Liv-

erpool Science Fiction Texts and Studies." Liverpool University Press, ISBN 0-85323-831-6, xix+213pp, trade paperback, cover by Yves Tanguy, no price shown. (Critical study of J. G. Ballard's sf and other fiction; first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; it states "copyright 1997" inside, though it was delayed to early 1998; we have seen no reviews of the book anywhere, except for a negative one by Nicholas Ruddick which appeared prematurely in *SF Studies* no. 73 [November 1997] and was presumably based on a proof copy; a new critique of Ballard is always welcome – it has been over six years since the last, Gregory Stephenson's *Out of the Night and Into the Dream* [Greenwood Press, 1991]; Roger Luckhurst, although formidably intelligent, is less readable than Stephenson, but the latter's thesis – that Ballard is a "transcendentalist" – was perhaps simplistic; Luckhurst, on the other hand, unsentimentally attempts to grapple with knotty problems, knottily; like so many postmodernist critics he is overfond of name-dropping [Derrida, Lyotard, Baudrillard, Jameson, all the usuals] and is too wedded to Theory with a capital "t"; but there is much in this book to provoke thought: clearly, it's a required item for all those seriously interested in Ballard.) Late entry: 15th January publication, sent to us by the author in March 1998.

Luckhurst, Roger. **"The Angle Between Two Walls": The Fiction of J. G. Ballard.** St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-17439-X, xix+213pp, hardcover, cover by Yves Tanguy, \$39.95. (Critical study of J. G. Ballard's sf and other fiction; first published in the UK, 1998 [not "1997" as it states inside]; the February 1998 *Locus* lists it among its recommended non-fiction books of 1997 – even though it did not appear in 1997.) 9th March 1998.

Lumley, Brian. **Maze of Worlds.** "The long-awaited sequel to *The House of Doors*!" Tor, ISBN 0-312-86604-6, 380pp, hardcover, \$25.95. (Horror novel, first published in the UK as *The House of Doors: Second Visit*, 1997; proof copy received.) June 1998.

Lynn, Elizabeth A. **Dragon's Winter.** Ace, ISBN 0-441-00502-0, 341pp, hardcover, cover by Duane O. Myers, \$21.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1998; World Fantasy Award-winning Lynn's comeback novel; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 131.) 1st April 1998.

McCaffrey, Anne. **Dragonseye.** Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-41879-4, 390pp, A-format paperback,



cover by Eric Peterson, \$6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the UK as *Red Star Rising*, 1996; a "Dragonriders of Pern" novel.) Late entry: 1st February publication, received in March 1998.

McDonald, Ian. **Kirinya**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06077-8, 412pp, hardcover, cover by Mike Posen, £16.99. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; sequel to *Chaga* [1995].) 18th June 1998.

McMullen, Sean. **The Centurion's Empire**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85131-6, 383pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; about a time-travelling Roman centurion who ends up in the 21st century, this is McMullen's third novel but his first to be published outside Australia.) June 1998.

McQuinn, Donald E. **The Prisoner Within**. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-40044-S, 373pp, A-format paperback, cover by Donato Giancola, \$6.99. (Sf novel, first edition; it appears to be militaristic planetary romance.) Late entry: 1st February publication, received in March 1998.

Masterton, Graham. **House of Bones**. Point Horror, ISBN 0-590-19682-0, 236pp, A-format paperback, £3.50. (Juvenile horror novel, first edition.) March 1998.

Mathews, Richard. **Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination**. "Twayne's Studies in Literary Themes and Genres." Twayne, ISBN 0-8057-0958-4, xx+223pp, hardcover, cover by Tim Garjek, £18.95. (Study of fantasy fiction, dealing mainly with the classics from William Morris through Tolkien and Robert E. Howard to Ursula Le Guin; first published in the USA, 1997; this is the American first edition with a UK price, distributed in Britain by Prentice Hall, Campus 400, Maylands Ave., Hemel Hempstead, Herts. HP2 7EZ; it is the first Twayne title we have been sent for review, and we are interested to note that they have also published, in the same series, a book called *Science Fiction After 1900: From the Steam Man to the Stars* [1997] by Brooks Landon.) 27th March 1998.

Matthews, Susan R. **Prisoner of Conscience**. Avon/Eos, ISBN 0-380-78914-0, 312pp, A-format paperback, \$3.99. (Sf novel, first edition; a second novel by the author of *An Exchange of Hostages* [1997]; Stephen R. Donaldson compares her to Dostoevsky [!]; a better comparison might be Gene Wolfe since, like its predecessor it has a torturer/inquisitor as hero; the style does not match Wolfe's, though; see also remarks under Severna Park, below.) Late entry: February publication, received in March 1998.

Modesitt, L. E., Jr. **The White Order**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-86645-

3, 381pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; the eighth "Recluce" novel.) May 1998.

Nicholls, Stan. **A Gathering of Shadows**. "The final book in *The Nightshade Chronicles*." Point Fantasy, ISBN 0-590-19075-X, 222pp, A-format paperback, cover by David Wyatt, £3.99. (Juvenile fantasy novel, first edition.) March 1998.

Nichols, Adam. **The Paladin: Book One of the Whiteblade Saga**. Millennium, ISBN 0-75281-S62-8, S03pp, A-format paperback, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; the author lives in Canada, and this Norse-flavoured fantasy is his third novel, following *The War of the Lords Veil* [1994] and *The Pathless Way* [1996] – both are also available in Millennium paperback.) 6th April 1998.

Park, Severna. **Hand of Prophecy**. Avon/Eos, ISBN 0-380-97639-0, 307pp, hardcover, \$14. (Sf novel, first edition; this is one of a series of small-format, relatively cheap hardcovers, with minimalist covers, which Avon are releasing as part of their new "Eos" sf/fantasy programme; it's a second novel by an author who specializes in "gender-bending" sf [fast becoming a new sub-category of the genre in the USA, with its own system of awards, small-press magazines, etc]; Elizabeth Hand commends it as "a terrific novel" and says that Park is "an important new novelist to watch"; odd how things turn around: everyone used to condemn John Norman, and other paperback writers of his ilk, for their bondage/submission and sado-masochistic fantasies, but now these subjects are becoming "respectable" in the wake of gay-and-lesbian sf; this book by the appropriately named Severna appears to be an intellectualized, futuristic, slaver-cum-gladiatorial fantasy; well, sf is a broad genre: to each her own.) Late entry: 11th February publication, received in March 1998.

Pellegrino, Charles. **Dust**. Avon, ISBN 0-380-97308-1, x+387pp, hardcover, \$15.95. (Sf novel, first edition; it's a near-future, technothriller-type disaster story by an American author who is best known for his non-fiction pop-science books and who looks as though he may be trying to outdo Michael Crichton here; there is a lengthy author's afterword and scientific bibliography; Arthur C. Clarke commends it as "a novel even scarier than *Jaws*.".) Late entry: 11th February publication, received in March 1998.

Pohl, Frederik. **O Pioneer!** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86164-8, 254pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; it has been serialized in *Analog*

magazine; it's good to see that the veteran Pohl [born 1919] is keeping busy, although he is by no means the oldest sf writer still active – Arthur C. Clarke, L. Sprague de Camp, Philip José Farmer, Jack Vance and Jack Williamson are all older, and so for that matter are the now-silent Charles L. Harness and A. E. van Vogt.) May 1998.

Pratchett, Terry. **The Last Continent**. Doubleday, ISBN 0-385-40989-3, 281pp, hardcover, cover by Josh Kirby, £16.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition; the 22nd "Discworld" novel, and the first to appear from Transworld Publishing's Doubleday imprint; in this one TP tackles the Discworld's version of Australia.) 7th May 1998.

Resnick, Mike. **A Hunger in the Soul**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85438-2, 221pp, hardcover, \$20.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; like so much of Resnick's work, it seems to be set in an sf stand-in for Africa – in this case, a planet called "Bushveld"; the hero is called Robert Markham, which is an old pseudonym of Kingsley Amis's [though Resnick is probably unaware of that].) May 1998.

Robinson, Roger. **(Re)commended Science Fiction: A "core library" listing of over 1200 titles based on nominations for the major science fiction and fantasy awards between 1949 & 1997**. Beccon Publications [75 Rosslyn Ave., Harold Wood, Essex RM3 0RG], ISBN 1-870824-40-7, 44pp, AS stapled booklet, £3.50. (Alphabetical-by-author listing of notable sf/fantasy books, first edition; "for each copy sold a donation of £0.50 will be made to The Science Fiction Foundation"; a useful and up-to-date list, but the problem with it, of course, is that since it's entirely based on awards-nominations much fine material is omitted: of all J. G. Ballard's books, for example, only *The Unlimited Dream Company* is included, because that happened to be nominated for a John W. Campbell Award – works like *The Drawn World* and *The Crystal World* are missing because they were not shortlisted for anything.) 10th April 1998.

Rucker, Rudy. **Freeware**. Avon/Eos, ISBN 0-380-78159-X, viii+262pp, A-format paperback, cover by Raquel Jaramillo, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1997; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 122.) Late entry: 11th February publication, received in March 1998.

Salvatore, R. A. **The Sword of Bedwyr**. "Book 1 of *The Crimson Shadow*." Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648343-7, 247pp, A-format paperback, cover by Harvey Parker, £5.99. (Fantasy novel,

first published in the USA, 1995.) 6th April 1998.

Saul, John. **The Blackstone Chronicles**. Fawcett Columbine, ISBN 0-449-00192-X, S27pp, trade paperback, cover by Danilo Ducak, \$14.95. (Horror novel, first published in the USA as a six-part series of separately-released novellas, 1997; reviewed by Peter Crowther in *Interzone* 125.) Late entry: 1st February publication, received in March 1998.

Saul, John. **The Blackstone Chronicles**. Arrow, ISBN 0-09-927023-4, S27pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA as a six-part series of separately-released novellas, 1997.) 19th March 1998.

Scott, Melissa. **The Shapes of Their Hearts**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85877-9, 301pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; the publishers describe it as "a hot new cyber-SF novel.") June 1998.

Shinn, Sharon. **The Alleluia Files**. Ace, ISBN 0-441-00505-S, 474pp, C-format paperback, cover by John Jude Palencar, \$13.95. (Sf/fantasy/romantic novel, first edition; conclusion of the angels-on-another-planet trilogy which began with *Archangel* and *Jovah's Angel*.) 1st April 1998.

Shinn, Sharon. **Jovah's Angel**. Ace, ISBN 0-441-00519-S, 3S8pp, A-format paperback, cover by John Jude Palencar, \$6.50. (Sf/fantasy/romantic novel, first published in the USA, 1997; sequel to *Archangel*.) 1st April 1998.

Stasheff, Christopher. **A Wizard in Midgard**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-86033-1, 2S5pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Sf/fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; latest in the "Rogue Wizard" sub-series of Stasheff's interminable science-fantasy series [from various publishers under various different sub-series titles] which began way-back-when [well, in 1969 to be precise] with *The Warlock in Spite of Himself*.) June 1998.

Stine, R. L. **Goosebumps Slimy Special: Monster Blood, Monster Blood II, Monster Blood III**. Scholastic/Hippo, ISBN 0-590-54316-4, 378pp, B-format softback [plastic cover], £7.99. (Juvenile horror omnibus, first edition; the three constituent novels were originally published separately in the USA, 1992, 1994 and 1995; all are copyright "Parachute Press, Inc.") March 1998.

Stout, Amy. **The Royal Four: Book II of The One Land Saga**. Avon/Eos, ISBN 0-380-79190-0, xv+301pp, A-format paperback, \$5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1997; although it's by an American writer this originally appeared in Britain last summer,

from NEL, and is now out in the USA for the first time.) *Late entry: February publication, received in March 1998.*

Tate, Len. **The Croxton Witch.** Marionette Books [1 Hutton Close, South Church, Bishop Auckland, County Durham DL14 6XB]. ISBN 1-84039-010-7, 190pp, trade paperback, £7.95. (Horror novel, first edition; the author is described as, "under pseudonyms ... an established writer of westerns.") *No date shown: received in March 1998.*

Tolkien, J. R. R. **Unfinished Tales of Numenor and Middle-earth.** Edited by Christopher Tolkien. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-261-10362-8, vii+613pp, A-format paperback, cover by John Howe, £6.99. (Fantasy collection, first published in 1980.) *6th April 1998.*

Turtledove, Harry. **The Great War: American Front.** "An Alternate History of the War to End All Wars." Del Rey, ISBN 0-

345-40615-X, 503pp, hardcover, \$25. (Alternative-timeline sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; sequel to *How Few Remain* [which first appeared only about six months ago - with another, unconnected, novel, *Between the Rivers*, appearing from Tor just a couple of months ago]; the trouble with very prolific writers like Turtledove is that they do tend to beat every half-way decent idea into the ground, what with their instant 500-page sequels and multi-volume series ... can't the man take a rest for a year or two?) *June 1998.*

Vance, Jack. **Night Lamp.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86472-8, 380pp, trade paperback, cover by Vladimir Nenov, \$14.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1996; a "Gaeen Reach" novel; reviewed, enthusiastically, by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 114.) *11th March 1998.*

Vance, Jack. **Night Lamp.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648211-2, 380pp, A-format paperback,

cover by Mick Van Houten, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1996; Chris Gilmore's *Interzone* review is quoted on the front cover of this edition: "Rush out and buy this glorious book.") *16th March 1998.*

Vitola, Denise. **Manjinn Moon.** Ace, ISBN 0-441-00521-7, 266pp, A-format paperback, cover by Neal McPheeters, \$5.99. (Sf/horror/crime novel, first edition; about a lycanthropic detective who operates in a near-future setting, it's a fine old mixture of genres; follow-up to *Quantum Moon* and *Opalite Moon*.) *April 1998.*

Weis, Margaret, and Tracy Hickman. **The Mantle of Kendis-Dai: A Starshield Novel.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-598-3, vi+353pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA as *Starshield: Sentinels*, 1996; more space-operatics from these well-known fantasy writers.) *2nd April 1998.*

Wilson, Robert Charles. **Darwinia.** "A novel of a very different twentieth century." Tor, ISBN 0-312-86038-2, 320pp, hardcover, cover by Jim Burns, \$22.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; this sounds rather like J. G. Ballard's *Hello America* in reverse: the "Darwinia" of the title is a depopulated, reforested Europe, which Americans rediscover and explore; Tor do not normally send us covers with their proofs, but we can see why they did in this case - another cracker from Jim Burns which, combined with this novel's intriguing title, should help sell lots of copies.) *July 1998.*

Wurts, Janny. **Fugitive Prince: The Wars of Light and Shadows, Volume 4: First Book of The Alliance of Light.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648299-6, 565pp, A-format paperback, cover by Don Maitz, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA [?], 1997.) *6th April 1998.*

Claremont, Chris, and George Lucas. **Shadow Dawn: Second in the Chronicles of the Shadow War.** Bantam, ISBN 0-553-50482-7, 511pp, A-format paperback, cover by Ciruelo Cabral, £5.99. (Sharecrop fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1997; it seems to have been written entirely by Claremont, although based on a "story by" Lucas and copyrighted "Lucasfilm Ltd.") *9th April 1998.*

Cole, Stephen, ed. **Short Trips: A Collection of Short Stories.** "Doctor Who." BBC Books, 0-563-40560-0, viii+336pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff collection, first edition; there is a simultaneous audio-tape version [six stories], priced at £7.99; it contains 15 all-original Whovian stories by mainly new British writers; among the better-known authors are Jonathan Blum [an American, now married to the Australian "Doctor Who" writer Kate Orman], Simon Bucher-Jones, Guy Clapperton, Paul Leonard, Steve Lyons and Daniel O'Mahoney.) *2nd March 1998.*

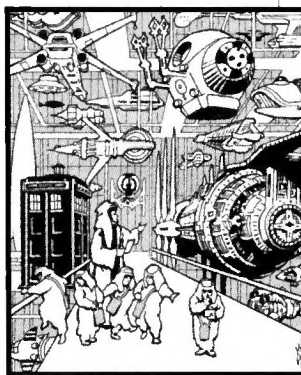
Collier, Michael. **Longest Day.** "Doctor Who." BBC Books, 0-563-40581-3, 276pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first edition.) *2nd March 1998.*

Crispin, A. C. **Rebel Dawn: Han Solo Trilogy, Book Three.** "Star Wars." Bantam, ISBN 0-553-50548-3, ix+389pp, A-format paperback, cover by Drew Struzan, £5.99. (Sf movie spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1998.) *9th April 1998.*

David, Peter. **In the Beginning.** "Babylon 5." Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-42452-2, 255pp, A-format paperback, \$5.99. (Sf TV-series novelization, first edition;

## Spinoffery

*This is a list of all baaks received that fall into these sub-types of sf, fantasy and harrar which may be termed novelizations, recursive fictions, spinoffs, sequels by ather hands, shared warlds and share-craps (including nan-fiction about shared warlds, films and TV, etc.). The collective term "Spinoffery" is used far the sake of brevity.*



based on a script by J. Michael Straczynski for a feature-length episode.) *Late entry: 1st January publication, received in March 1998.*

Leonard, Paul, and Nick Walters. **Dry Pilgrimage.** "The New Adventures." Virgin, ISBN 0-426-20525-1, 292pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jon Sullivan, £5.99. (Shared-universe sf novel, featuring the galactic adventures of Bernice Summerfield [a former associate of Doctor Who]; first edition.) *21st May 1998.*

Lyons, Steve. **The Witch Hunters.** "Doctor Who." BBC Books, 0-563-40579-1, 282pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first edition; it's set at the time of the Salem witch-trials.) *2nd March 1998.*

Molstad, Stephen. **Silent Zone.** "Independence Day." Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648342-9, 268pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf movie spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1997; a prequel to the film *Independence Day*, created by Dean Devlin and Roland Emmerich; Molstad, hitherto unknown as a writer, was the novelizer of that movie, and previously had an uncredited hand in

the novelization of the same team's *StarGate*.) *6th April 1998.*

Peel, John. **Legacy of the Daleks.** "Doctor Who." BBC Books, 0-563-40574-0, 245pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first edition.) *6th April 1998.*

Richards, Justin. **The Medusa Effect.** "The New Adventures." Virgin, ISBN 0-426-20524-3, 258pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mark Salwowski, £5.99. (Shared-universe sf novel, featuring the galactic adventures of Bernice Summerfield [a former associate of Doctor Who]; first edition.) *16th April 1998.*

Rochussen, Alan G. **The Complete Next Generation Trek IQ Book.** Bantam, ISBN 0-7522-2462-X, 496pp, B-format paperback, £7.99. (Sf TV-series trivia questionnaire spinoff, first published in the USA [?], 1998; unlike most of its kind, it's very bulky, and claims to draw its questions from "every single episode" of the seven-year run of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.) *24th April 1998.*

Salvatore, R. A. **Tarzan: The Epic Adventures.** Arrow, ISBN 0-09-926959-7, 280pp, A-format

paperback, £5.99. (Fantasy TV series novelization, based on a script by Burton Armus for the U5 series starring Joe Lara as Tarzan, which in turn was based on two old novels by Edgar Rice Burroughs, *The Return of Tarzan* [1915] and *Tarzan at the Earth's Core* [1930]; first published in the USA, 1996; this must be the first Tarzan novel - by ERB or anyone else - to be published in Britain for many years; the Four Square/New English Library editions of Burroughs which brightened many of our childhoods have long since lapsed out of print, and Joe R. Lansdale's recent "completion" of an ERB fragment, *Torzan: The Lost Adventure*, has not appeared here; welcome back, Ape Man.) *2nd April 1998.*

Topping, Keith, and Martin Day. **The Hollow Men.** "Doctor Who." BBC Books, 0-563-40582-1, 284pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first edition.) *6th April 1998.*

Yarbro, Chelsea Quinn. **The Angry Angel: Sisters of the Night [Volume One].** Illustrated by Christopher H. Bing. Avon, ISBN 0-380-97400-2, 359pp, hardcover, cover by Bing, \$23. (Horror novel, spun off from Bram Stoker's *Dracula*; first edition; it's the opener in a trilogy dealing with the lives of the three vampire sisters who appeared briefly in Stoker's novel; it also appears to be a "packaged" book, in that the copyright is shared by Yarbro and an outfit called SwordsSmith Productions [editor Leigh Grossman, associate editor Lesley McBain ... and so on in a listing that begins to resemble the credits of a Hollywood movie].) *11th March 1998.*

### BRITISH FANTASY CONVENTION:

If you want to meet GoH Jane Yolen and Freda Warrington, or MC Ramsey Campbell, or other SF, fantasy and horror writers such as Graham Joyce, Kim Newman, Michael Marshall Smith, Tom Arden, if you want to see and hear panellists discussing all aspects of fantasy, come to Fantasycon XXII this September. Send an sae for full details: 46 Oxford Road, Acocks Green, Birmingham B27 6DT.

**GRAVITY'S ANGELS:** 14 stories of fantasy, horror, SF and slipstream, three Year's Best honourable mentions. £4.95 (cheques to T Party Writers Group) from Flat 2, 123 St Michael's Rd., Aldershot, Hants. GU12 4JW.

<http://www.fnaf.demon.co.uk/t-party>

**DAVID LANGFORD** is always seeking weird and wonderful sf gossip for his *IZ* column, and can be contacted at 94 London Rd., Reading RG1 5AU (e-mail to [ansible@cix.co.uk](mailto:ansible@cix.co.uk); visit his web site at <http://www.ansible.demon.co.uk>).

**FOR SALE:** SF/F, horror, mysteries, etc. Books, magazines, comics. Thousands. Free search. Send wants. No obligation. Also buying. Write: John Schneider, 1500 Main Avenue, Kaukauna, WI 54130, USA.

**OVER 10,000** SF, Fantasy & Horror paperbacks, magazines, pulps in stock! Rarities to reading copies. Wants lists encouraged, catalogues issued regularly. "The Talking Dead," 12 Rosamund Avenue, Merley, Dorset BH21 1TE (01202-849212). *Always buying.*

**MAELSTROM NO. 8** contains stories by John Light, Alan Casey, Jason Druce, Mike O'Driscoll, Robert Campbell, Joy Matthews and Steve Lockley. Available for £2.40 post free from Sol Publications, 24 Fowler Close, Southend-on-Sea, Essex SS1 2RD.

## SMALL ADS



**WANTED:** 2nd & 3rd Book of *Wraeththu* by Storm Constantine –reasonable price please! Donations gratefully and gracefully accepted! C. A. Grey, 7 Athole Gardens, Glasgow G12 9BQ.

**FANTASTIC LITERATURE.** Large, regular catalogues of quality science fiction, fantasy and horror for sale. Free lists: write now to Fantastic Literature, 35 The Ramparts, Rayleigh, Essex SS6 8PY.

**SCI-FINDER.** Register your web site at <http://www.sf-fantasy.com/sfind.htm> – the dedicated SF/F search engine.

**CHRIS GILMORE** doesn't just review... Have you a manuscript that needs just that little extra polish to be published? I offer honest opinions and expert attention at reasonable rates. Ring (01234-346142) or write: 27 Salisbury St., Bedford MK41 7RE.

**HARM'S WAY** – "What if Charles Dickens had written a space opera?" (*Locus*) – large paperback, £3.50. *The Hour of the Thin Ox* and *Other Voices*, paperbacks, £1.50 each. Prices include postage. Colin Greenland, 98 Sturton St., Cambridge CB1 2QA

**BOOKS – MAIL ORDER.** Orbital Trading Post: the planet's largest on-line SF/F bookshop at <http://www.sf-fantasy.com/otp.htm> – up to 40% off RRP!

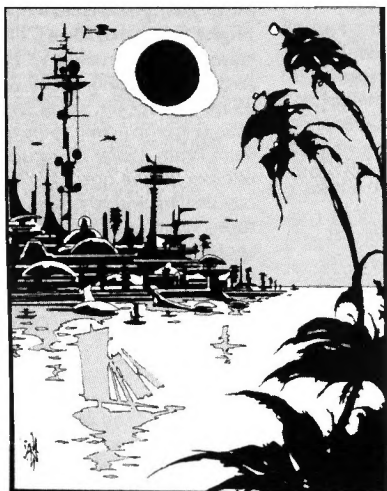
**SF, HORROR, FANTASY** paperback firsts/collectibles US & UK. Specialists in Howard, Burroughs, Dick, Brunner, Moorcock, Lovecraft, Doc Savage, Shadow, Pulp Heroes, but all pre-1980 authors represented. Send 50p SAE or \$2 cash for catalogues: Zardo Books, 20 Whitecroft, Dilton Marsh, Westbury, Wiltshire BA13 4DJ.

**HUGO AWARD**-winning *Science Fiction Chronicle*, published since 1979, has all the news of US and UK publishing, plus reviews, interviews, forthcoming books, much, much more. Sample copy £3.50, subscription 12/£29 airmail from Algal Press, c/o R. Hansen, 144 Plashet Grove, E. Ham, London E6 1AB.

**THE PALADIN MANDATES** by Mike Chinn. Ghost-busting adventures set in 1920s America. 70% proof; 30% speculation. Only £6.50 inc. p&p. Order from The Alchemy Press, 46 Oxford Road, Birmingham B27 6DT.

**BRIGHTON AREA** readers of *Interzone* are welcome to join us on Friday nights at The Mitre, a friendly pub on Baker Street (near the Open Market). A few of us meet from 9-11pm, in the smaller of the two rooms, for informal drink and chat. You'll recognize us by the copies of *IZ* or other sf publications lying around – so come along and make yourselves known. (Editors.)

**SMALL ADS** in *Interzone* reach 10,000 people. If you wish to advertise please send your ad copy, *together with payment*, to *Interzone*, 217 Preston Drive, Brighton BN1 6FL, UK. Rates: 25 pence per word, minimum of ten words, discount of 10% for insertions repeated in three issues (VAT is inclusive).



## COMING NEXT MONTH

In hand are new stories by Gary Couzens, Mary Soon Lee, Alastair Reynolds, Cherry Wilder...

There will also be more fiction from writers new to our pages (including some interesting foreigners) as well as from regular names. Plus all our usual features and reviews. Watch out for the July *Interzone*, number 133, on sale in June.



IN THE BEGINNING  
WAS THE WORD,  
AND THE  
WORD WAS  
VOYAGER

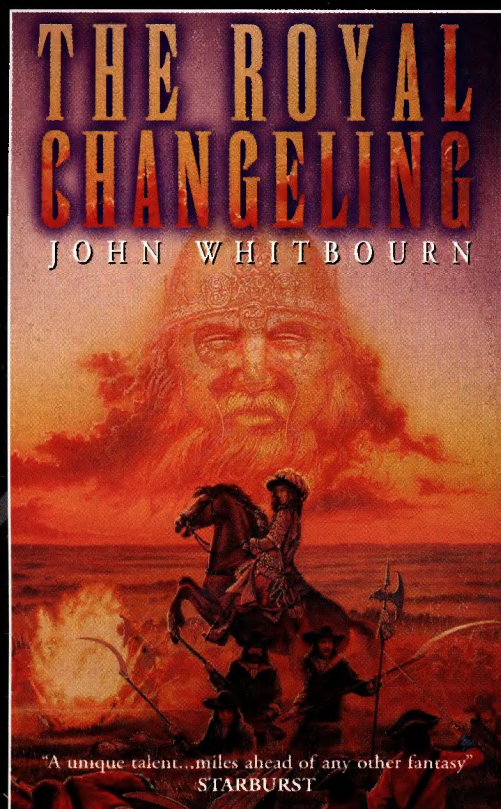


*Voyager*

[www.harpercollins.co.uk/voyager](http://www.harpercollins.co.uk/voyager)



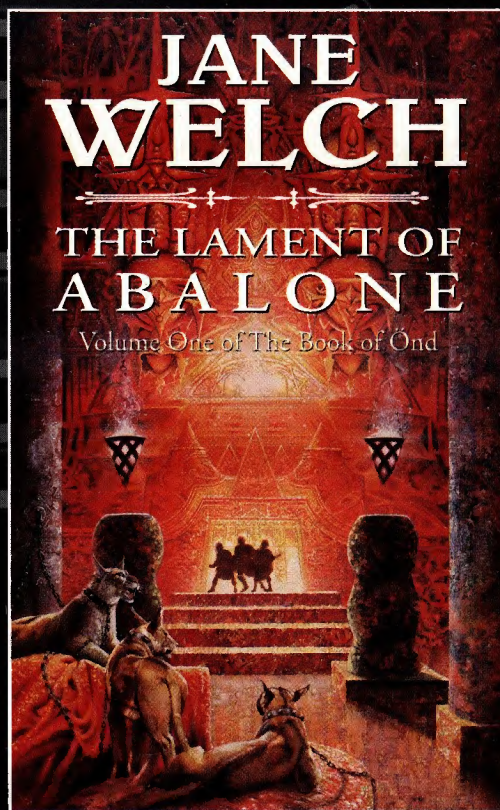
# EARTH LIGHT



Paperback £5.99 0 671 01785 3

With its grand sweep of war and intrigue, truth and fantasy, John Whitbourn's new novel will hold readers spellbound. His characters have all the qualities and faults of Tolkien's heroes and villains, yet they live and breathe in seventeenth-century England.

Jane Welch's first fantasy series *The Runespell Trilogy* gained great praise. Now, with *The Lament Of Abalone*, the first in her brand new series, Jane Welch once again casts her magic spell.



Paperback £5.99 0 671 01787 X



EARTHLIGHT

Here, Now, and in the Future